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Handbooks for the Clergy

EDITED BY

ARTHUR W. ROBINSON, B.D.

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# A CHRISTIAN APOLOGETIC

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BY

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTORY

THE subject of Apologetics is one with which the majority of Christians concern themselves only under protest. They are not interested in it; it seems to them unattractive and lacking in inspiration. The very word, Apology, suggests an atmosphere of strife, argument and counter-argument ceaselessly battling around a theme suited rather to serene contemplation than to the turmoil of polemics. Hence it comes that the subject is relegated, as a rule, to the theological class-room; it is regarded as one of those technical preparations for professional work, which has little to do with the more pressing problems of practical Christian life. And it must be confessed that, under these influences, Apologetics have become to a great extent formal and perfunctory, until dreariness of treatment goes far to justify the aversion which is commonly felt for the subject. Meanwhile, it is well to examine, a little more closely, the causes which have combined to produce so widespread an indifference.

It is certainly a humiliating confession, but probably mental and moral inertia have much to do with the unpopularity of Apologetics. It is hard work to examine the rational ground of one's religious convictions, to thresh out honestly the arguments for and against one's faith. And much unquestioning belief, as well as much soul-disturbing doubt, springs from no more dignified source than unwillingness to undergo the exertion incident to painstaking inquiry.

Others, again, who are not obnoxious to the charge of laziness, shrink from Apologetics because of a certain half-formulated fear. If an examination of evidence be instituted, is it not a little doubtful whither the process may ultimately lead? They believe now, asking no questions; but they are aware that many objections to Christianity have been raised, and that these have been accounted cogent by men of distinguished intelligence. Were it not rashness, then, to embark on so problematical a venture? It is not always easy to characterise this mood justly; according to circumstances, it may signify cowardice, or simply prudence. To tremble before the possible verdict of facts may easily pass into conscious insincerity; but, on the other hand, no one is under obligation to expose himself to danger unnecessarily. The plain man may easily be fooled by specious arguments; is it not

wiser for him to eschew all discussion, and trust implicitly the decision of such experts as he may choose? Undoubtedly there is a certain validity in this plea, and many must act thus. But, after all, such reasoning more or less begs the question. Experts are divided—how guarantee that a man shall choose wisely between them? Thus we are brought back to the point at which we started. The moment that a man is confronted with the Apologetic problem, he must face it to the best of his ability. If it be only in the decision as to which guide he is to follow, he must determine this rationally, in view of what appears to him good evidence. And this is to develop an Apologetic.

But far removed from these lower motives of laziness and fear, there are subtle spiritual forces arrayed against an enthusiastic appreciation of Apologetics. The man whose whole energy is engrossed in constructive work along lines of spiritual certitude, not unnaturally feels something of impatience at the thought of going back once more to the beginning, and marshalling the purely logical arguments which clear the ground for the structure of faith. It may be that there are many gaps in the intellectual process whereby he has arrived at his convictions; but, having reached the vantage-ground of assurance, and tested the strength of his position by experience, why waste time in per-

fecting what is no longer essential to the integrity of his religious life? There is force in this argument; but at least one important consideration would seem to be ignored. The Apostolic injunction must be reckoned with, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."[1] These words are significant, as opening up a whole realm of social obligation. Even though we be satisfied, we have not fulfilled our religious duty until we have done all that in us lies to give satisfaction to our fellows. The "reason of the hope that is in us" is at least one of the opportunities offered for exercising an influence on the belief of our brother. Undoubtedly we exert such an influence by the mere fact of our own effective and triumphant faith. Often this is the most convincing argument which we can bring to bear in the interests of religion. But there are minds, with a predominant craving for intellectual enlightenment, which demand a different kind of help. The law of charity prompts that we offer this help, even though we deem that for ourselves the need of formulated Apologetics is outgrown.

But, while treating the mystical plea—that spiritual advance renders logical argument unnecessary—with all respect, one is haunted by the

[1] 1 Peter iii. 15.

suspicion that, even as regards the individual himself, it were best not to press the claim too closely. Clear reasoning is always a healthy antidote to vagaries of the imagination. Sometimes those far advanced in holiness need the medicine. The most exalted of saints will not be less spiritual for a little plodding in the prosaic fields of critical investigation. Exceeding reverence for *facts* is an emotion which cannot be too often stimulated, for it is intimately allied with the loftiest virtues of sincerity and honesty. Hard labour in establishing the rational grounds which justify our assuming the attitude of faith at all must prove tonic in its effect. Many things which do not directly subserve spiritual edification, yet induce an earnestness of temper, a gentleness and humility, upon which all large spiritual results are conditional. Apologetics ought not, then, to be regarded as something which the mass of Christians are at liberty to neglect. Whether we are instinctively drawn to this line of thought is of secondary moment; our duty is plain—we are bound by every interest of our own spiritual development, as well as by the law of charity, to acquaint ourselves with the strongest arguments which can be adduced in defence of the Faith.

But the moment that we attempt to formulate any general system of Apology, we are met by a new difficulty. Every man needs a different

Apologetic. The force of an argument varies with the idiosyncrasy of the individual. Temperament, education, character, all go to determine shades of susceptibility to truth. To one who is keenly alive to nice logical distinctions, an argument will wear a very different face from that which it presents to the man who is open only to obvious and more or less coarse contrasts. The scholar's difficulties will have no meaning to the man in the street; and the objections of the latter will in turn seem trivial to the keener insight of more comprehensive knowledge. Arguments against Christianity, which range from the subtlest metaphysical speculations, and the most abstruse points of literary criticism, to the crass tirades of the popular lecturer, cannot be met by one and the same method of defence. In just so far as a system of Apologetics seeks to cover the whole field, and meet all possible objections, will it probably lose in convincing power. The ring of reality will be wanting wherever the apologist does not himself feel the full force of the opposing argument. And, as the strength of a chain depends on its weakest link, so a really strong appeal will be rendered ineffective, if, for the sake of thoroughness, it is made to include anything approaching a logical *tour de force*. It is better, therefore, as far as practical helpfulness is concerned, not to attempt too exhaustive a treatment, but to allow free play to the personal

equation. The vitality and intensity thus imported into the argument will more than compensate for what is lost in the way of comprehensiveness.

This must serve as excuse, if any be needed, for the method adopted in the following pages. No attempt has been made to adapt the defence to all possible lines of attack. The traditional divisions of the subject have been largely ignored. Many well-worn arguments have been abandoned, not necessarily as unsound, but because they have failed to appeal to the writer as having weight in view of the special exigencies of the present day. Nothing, indeed, has been included, which has not personally been put to the proof, and found efficacious in practical dealing with unbelief. Imperfect as the treatment may be in detail, it is hoped that the main outline of the argument will prove suggestive as a useful mode of approach to the well-nigh inexhaustible theme of Christian Evidences.

## CHAPTER II

### DEFINITION OF AIM

A NUMBER of questions press for settlement before we can proceed to formulate any Apologetic argument. First in importance is that which concerns the nature of the proof which we may hope to establish. Do we account it within the reach of Apology to demonstrate the validity of the Christian claim in such fashion that a reasonable man *must* believe? Or, on the other hand, are we to accept the more modest rôle of those who only seek to establish a probability? This distinction is of vital significance; to be in any doubt concerning it is to introduce hopeless confusion into our reasoning.

Moreover, it is of prime moment that we should understand clearly just what it is that we desire to prove. Vagueness, here again, spells sure disaster. It may seem, indeed, almost an impertinence to raise this question with reference to our present subject. Does not the very term, Apologetics, connote a definite line of inquiry and a self-evident purpose? But this superficial simplicity yields at the touch of analysis, and

we discover beneath it the possibility of widely varying aims. As a matter of fact, the impotence of much Apologetic literature is due to the indeterminateness of its reasoning. The argument fluctuates, now making for one goal and now for another, with the inevitable result that it finally arrives nowhere. For instance, what is the Christian apologist to take for granted? Shall he traverse the whole ground of the theistic position, and vindicate the truth against the aberrations of materialism and pantheism; or shall he assume the facts of natural religion, and only seek to defend the special claims put forward by the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Either procedure may be legitimate, but it conduces to clearness of thought to state which alternative is to be adopted. If the latter be the course chosen, it still remains to decide definitely what that Christianity is which we purpose to defend. Does it include any formulated system of theology? What is its relation to popular notions of inspiration, of miracles, of ecclesiastical polity? Can we, for Apologetic purposes, distinguish between what we may term essential Christianity and secondary truths, between premises and deductions from those premises?

Enough has been said to show that it is the part of wisdom to decide clearly on the path along which we propose to travel, and not set forth too hastily on an adventurous enterprise.

Many a logical disaster might have been averted by the simple precaution of defining aim and purpose accurately before plunging into the thick of argument.

In the first place, then, it should be stated that the argument of the present volume assumes that there is a God. The witness of conscience and reason to this truth is generally recognised by the best thought of the present day. And even amidst the coarser forms of unbelief an avowed atheism is rare. The popular mood is not that of dogmatic denial, but rather that of a vague and questioning agnosticism. If there be a God, can we know Him? Has He revealed Himself? Are there valid reasons for attributing to Him a moral nature, as we understand the word moral? Our approach to these questions will be indirect. It is believed that an answer to them will be found, by implication, in the following pages; but they do not constitute the guiding clue in our special line of investigation.

The end which we explicitly have in view, is to vindicate the reasonableness of the belief that Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of the living God. By supreme is meant adequate and final, in the sense that the revelation is all-sufficient for the religious needs of men. And while we hold that the abundant riches of His Person will ever find fuller and fuller recognition, as

the Spirit guides the Church into all truth, and that thus the Christian revelation is progressive, yet we maintain that the Gospel is not merely relatively, but absolutely, the best gift of God to man.

There is a sentiment widely current that the man who accepts the authority of Jesus Christ as divine is in a precarious position so far as reason is concerned; that, if he believes, he does so at the expense of his intelligence. This is constantly implied in much of the scientific and philosophical literature of the day, and finds more popular expression in the problem-novel and realistic drama. It is, moreover, the premise on which multitudes, who have drifted into religious indifferentism, erect their practical philosophy of life. And even within the Church it is all too common; many Christians are secretly filled with amaze at the signs of the times, and feel that they can but cling desperately to their faith, in spite of reason. This mood becomes articulate in the shibboleth "don't think," which is the watchword of intellectual despair not infrequently heard on the lips of religious reactionaries. Now, it is against this phase of modern infidelity that our argument arrays itself. It seeks to prove that, however difficult it may be to believe, it is from the point of view of reason at least equally difficult to disbelieve. These difficulties may thus be found

to neutralise each other, and leave the soul free to exercise its own distinctive powers in the discernment of spiritual things.

But in seeking to prove that it is reasonable to believe, we do not take upon ourselves the task of presenting an irrefragable demonstration. There is a curious vagueness in most minds as to the exact degree of conclusiveness which may justly be demanded of Christian Evidences. And this vagueness may work serious detriment to the apologist. Many excellent arguments are spoiled by claiming too much. We are carried along by a sound logic, feel its force, and are sympathetically open to conviction, when suddenly an unqualified conclusion is drawn which arouses to instant revolt every instinct of fair play within us. This has been perhaps the besetting weakness of Apologetic literature. Spiritual things, from their very nature, are not to be demonstrated by any purely intellectual process. The most that reason can do is to clear the ground; its function is only indirect in generating belief. And even as regards those outward facts which are most closely related to spiritual truth, the claim to establish them beyond a peradventure is futile. Take as an illustration the central fact recorded in the Gospels, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The historic reality of this fact not only has not been proved, but it is manifestly impossible that

it should be proved, in such sense as would warrant us in applying the word, demonstration, to the argument. This holds true of every historic fact, though the amount of evidence required to produce conviction in a given case varies with the practical consequences involved. If such fact is of little present moment in the affairs of men, slight proof suffices. As its implications grow more serious, its establishment as a fact becomes proportionately more difficult; at least, stronger and more patent arguments are requisite to that end. In the case of a fact replete with the most momentous consequences, like that of the Resurrection, it is doubtful whether any mere logical process can establish its certainty so as to compel acknowledgment on the part of all truth-loving men. The most that we can hope is so to marshal the evidence that a reasonable probability shall be established, and thus, the question being lifted above the entanglements of the understanding, spiritual considerations may legitimately turn the scale in favour of belief. But to adopt the slightest arrogance of tone, boasting of certainty when, in fact, our logical achievement is of a humbler order, is wantonly to undermine the force of the most careful reasoning, and to discredit our cause with all who think clearly.

Some will doubtless argue that this admission tends to rob Apologetics of all practical effective-

ness. Religion, they will say, must be based on certitude, probabilities can never stir the enthusiasm of the heart. This is true; but the certitude is that of faith, and not of intellectual demonstration. And if it seem a small thing to increase the weight of a probability, let it be remembered by what slight and impalpable movements the spirit is determined toward belief or unbelief.

Walter Pater, in commenting on a well-known character in fiction, draws a subtle picture of the influence of nice differences of temperament: "Robert Elsmere was a type of a large class of minds which cannot be sure that the sacred story is true. It is philosophical, doubtless, and a duty to the intellect to recognise our doubts, to locate them, perhaps to give them practical effect. It may be also a moral duty to do this. But then there is also a large class of minds which cannot be sure it is false—minds of very various degrees of conscientiousness and intellectual power, up to the highest. They will think those who are quite sure it is false unphilosophical through lack of doubt. For their part, they make allowance in their scheme of life for a great possibility, and with some of them that bare concession of possibility (the subject of it being what it is) becomes the most important fact in the world. The recognition of it straightway opens wide the door to hope and love; and such persons are, as we fancy they

always will be, the nucleus of a Church. Their particular phase of doubt, of philosophic uncertainty, has been the secret of millions of good Christians, multitudes of worthy priests. They knit themselves to believers, in various degrees, of all ages."[1] If there be truth in this delicate analysis, then to establish a probability may prove a mighty accomplishment in the interests of faith.

We have stated that our single aim is to prove the reasonableness of believing that Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God. We do not seek, however, to establish any theological propositions, by way of inference, from that revelation. In saying that Jesus Christ *is* the revelation of God, we certainly imply that He is divine. But any exact doctrinal definition of the divinity of Christ lies beyond the proper scope of Apologetics. We are concerned with a question prior to all theological developments, namely: Is there reasonable ground in the recorded life of Jesus Christ for the building up of any theology whatsoever? Nor are we directly interested in substantiating any special theory of inspiration. It is enough for our immediate purpose if the Scripture may be relied upon as giving trustworthy testimony concerning the life and character of Jesus Christ. The exigencies of our argument, indeed, require us to propound

[1] "Essays from the Guardian," by Walter Pater, p. 73.

tentatively certain views concerning the miraculous element which enters into Christianity, but these are entirely subsidiary and incidental. Our interest centres solely in the fact of the divine-human life of Jesus Christ, and the validity of His claim to our whole-hearted allegiance.

It may help us if we bear in mind an analogy drawn from the tactics of earthly warfare. It is good policy, when the battle is hot, to concentrate one's forces around the citadel. If the line of defence be stretched rashly, the ground cannot be as well covered, and a vigorous attack on the part of the foe may find the base of supplies exposed, and the vital centre of the whole struggle unguarded. Apology is warfare. The truth dear to us is threatened; we would fain defend it. It is as important that the defence should be conducted with intelligence as that we should fight valorously. The essential truth of the Gospel is the citadel; until we have made that quite safe we will not suffer our attention to be diverted, or our forces scattered, by any feint of the foe to capture an outpost. We would not impute disingenuousness of motive, but certain it is that the antagonists of Christianity seem always quick to seize the opportunity of obscuring the main issue by raising a cloud of dust on the outskirts of the field. Mr. Huxley's trenchant attack, in his controversy with Dr. Wace, on the credibility of the miracle wrought on the Gadarene

demoniacs, is a case in point. His avowed aim was to make the whole question of the truth of the Gospel narrative hinge on a physiological theory. And while the details of such secondary questions are made the subject of lively debate, it is quietly assumed by the rationalistic objector that no stronger arguments than those under immediate discussion are available for the defence of the Christian position. Of course, in this particular instance, Mr. Huxley maintained that demoniacal possession is so intimately inwrought with the whole structure of the Gospels that, with it, their general trustworthiness must stand or fall, and that, therefore, his mode of attack was amply justified. But it is just this contention that we deny. If it could be proved that the writers of the New Testament were mistaken in their diagnosis of certain diseases, and that they represented their Master as sharing in their ignorance, this would not necessarily impair the soundness of their testimony concerning the moral and spiritual character of Jesus Christ and His teaching. Therefore, to pour scorn and ridicule on one incident recorded in the Scripture narrative, while it may be clever polemic, is absolutely worthless as an argument against the divine claim of the Gospel. We must resolutely decline to be entrapped by any such device. There will be time enough to debate concerning details when we have thoroughly

settled the more important question upon which the significance and interest of the details depend. There is only one question essential to the integrity of Christianity: Was Jesus Christ divine? That a man who respects reason and obeys its dictates can believe that He was, is the thesis which we are interested to prove.

## CHAPTER III

### APOLOGETICS IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN THOUGHT

A NICE discernment is needed if we are to adjust wisely the relative claims of past and present modes of thought. It is easy to err, either on the side of undue sympathy with the spirit of the age, or on that of reactionary protest; but to rise to a truly catholic judgment is hard.

We are all familiar with that provincial type of mind which reasons as though there were a kind of finality in modern scientific enlightenment, and the intellectual acquisitions of the past were discredited. But over against this exaggeration stands another, which more particularly threatens the religious temperament. Deference for the past is wise, but when it breeds indifference or suspicion toward the great currents of present-day thought, it easily degenerates into a gross superstition. Not infrequently an amazing dishonour is thus done to God in the name of religion. He is, in effect, banished to a remote period of history, and the tokens of His presence are sought for diligently in ancient records

and far-off events. Meanwhile, all the profoundest movements of contemporary life are accounted secular, save as they dimly reflect the light of former revelations, when God vouchsafed a more immediate knowledge of Himself. It matters little, whether with Protestant prejudice we confine this revelation narrowly to Scriptural events, or, with wider ecclesiastical horizon, include the so-called ages of faith. Any sympathetic understanding of the past is bought too dearly if it sap the enthusiasm of our interest in the present revelation of the living God. We have no warrant for believing that any time was ever more sacred than the present, any spot holier than that whereon we stand—if only our eye be enlightened to behold the vision, our ear unstopped to hear the word of God.

The bearing of this truth on Apologetics is obvious. Not only must we, for practical reasons, adjust our method to the special needs of the time, or else fail utterly in the one purpose which we have in view, but, in the more searching criticism to which the credentials of Christianity are subjected in these latter days, we are to see a providential leading of God. Individual critics may, or may not, be actuated by worthy motives; but the mighty movement of which they are representative has divine meaning, and is pregnant with spiritual consequences. Not grudgingly, but eagerly and reve-

rently, should we seek to adapt our argument to the special exigencies of modern thought. It is true, that in studying the attacks of unbelief from the earliest Christian centuries down to the present day, we discover once and again similarities which tempt us to exclaim—it is the same old story always. But while certain broad lines of objection abide, the accent with which they are uttered is shifted; and, to a great extent, the development of the scientific and critical method within the last century has completely revolutionised the whole aspect of the controversy.

If one were asked to name the most valuable contribution of the nineteenth century to the world's thought, it surely would not be far wide of the mark to answer—the inductive method. Of course, induction is no new thing. It is only necessary to define the word to discover that it is not only the scientific, but the common-sense mode of increasing knowledge. It has been practised in all ages and by all men in their ordinary processes of thinking. And yet we are not wrong in claiming that induction is distinctive of the thought of the last hundred years; for, during that period, it has been applied to well-nigh all fields of research, with a thoroughness quite unparalleled before, and has produced astonishing results, both theoretical and practical.

So simple and so manifestly rational is the method, that we are left to wonder that the world waited so long before using it in systematic fashion for the discovery of truth. To define the method in briefest terms — it consists in the accumulation of facts, the classification of facts, and in generalisation, or the inference of universal laws from the facts thus classified. It is hardly necessary to point out that the inference from an indefinite number of facts cannot be an absolute universal. But by this method we establish a probable universal, or working hypothesis, which can in turn be indefinitely verified by further observation, until it is practically proved to be an unvarying law. The assumption that, because this is pre-eminently the method of science, it must needs be strictly limited in its application, is ill-considered. It is hard to see why its application should not be as wide as the domain of facts; though, by this, we do not mean that it is the only legitimate method of reasoning. The charge is sometimes brought against theologians that they deny its validity as applied to the phenomena of religion, and that they prefer to assume premises arbitrarily, and thence deduce facts according to their inclination or convenience. But if there be any colour of reality in this contention, it is certainly due quite as much to the narrow construction which the scientific mind puts on the inductive method, as to the dogma-

tism of the theologian. Very inadequate views as to the exact nature and significance of that method are widely prevalent. Its metaphysical implications are disregarded, and the facts deemed worthy of investigation are confined within absurdly restricted lines.

There are certain postulates upon which any process of induction must rest, and these ought to be recognised clearly. Moreover, these postulates vary with the class of facts under consideration. However the truth may be ignored or disguised, it still remains undeniable that, for the scientific investigation of the simplest material phenomena, we must assume that the universe is essentially rational. Unless one is to adopt the attitude of a pure, subjective idealism—a course which presumably will not appeal to the scientific temper of the day—there must be an outward order corresponding to the categories of our own mind; otherwise, there could be no classification of facts, or inference establishing general laws. In application to moral facts, the analogous postulate, that the universe is essentially moral, is requisite. By this we mean that there are moral laws discernible, which are just as inevitable and as universal as the physical laws in accord with which the material world is governed. The moralist must not be blamed—as though he were hostile to the inductive method—if he protests against any juggling with the meaning of

the word moral. He has no choice but to set himself irreconcilably against any derivation of the moral ideal from the necessities of material existence, or mere considerations of social expediency. Here the real question at issue is, not whether a certain method of investigation is applicable to a certain class of facts, but whether there is ground for regarding the facts themselves as forming an independent class. It were a misnomer to speak of the inductive study of morals, without making the postulate that there is an eternal distinction between right and wrong. Similarly, as regards induction in the spiritual sphere, the requisite postulate is that the universe is essentially spiritual. If there are no spiritual facts, then the whole question as to applying induction to them falls. But if there are such facts, then in any attempt to classify them and arrive at a knowledge of general laws, we are obliged to assume the existence of a spiritual world, an ordered domain where love reigns supreme; for this alone can justify scientific inquiry.

The inductive method, thus interpreted, plainly includes religion in its sweep—so far, at least, as religion can be made the subject of intellectual research. And Apologetics must frankly reckon with such a method, if the evidential argument is to have cogency in the present day. We cannot start with a theory spun out of our own minds

or based on authority, and deduce facts from the theory. We must be content to begin with facts, and advance from these to our general propositions. The facts, moreover, must be plain facts, level with the apprehension of the man whom we hope to convince. If there be room to doubt the facts adduced as a basis of the induction, this will vitiate the force of the whole argument. And here it becomes evident why the fundamental ground of Apologetics must be shifted from miracles to the moral character of Jesus Christ, and verifiable facts of present religious experience. The question of miracles will come up for more detailed discussion later; but this much is self-evident, the process of reasoning, whereby we seek to establish the miracles of the Gospel, must be far more complicated than that required to prove the moral supremacy of Jesus Christ, and the answer which He makes to the deepest cravings of the heart. There are other reasons which render the subject of the miraculous unsuited for a place in the forefront of our argument. There is the great difficulty of definition; for the modern mind, with its reverence for law, revolts against the suggestion of a sporadic violation of nature's order. Nor is it perfectly plain how, in any case, a mere physical event—be it never so wonderful—can accredit a message as divine. But, entirely apart from all such considerations, we need present facts, patent

to every man who will turn his eyes in the right direction, if we are to formulate an inductive argument having weight and consistency. This would seem to be the most wide-reaching modification required in modern Apologetics—a shifting of the accent from the past to the present, from the miraculous to the moral. It does not necessarily mean the abandonment of any traditional position. We merely change the formation in our line of defence to meet the varying needs of the hour. And it is the part of wisdom to yield ourselves cheerfully to the demand, without qualification and without unnecessary protest.

Our meaning will be clearer, perhaps, if we here present in briefest outline the course of the proposed argument.

The fundamental fact, upon which all subsequent reasoning will be based, is the unique moral influence of Jesus Christ. However explained, the fact cannot be denied—Jesus Christ is the central figure of all history. When brought into comparison with Him, all the great names of the world's heroes shrink into relative insignificance. If, for a moment, the thought of other religious founders gives us pause, we have but to consider the debt which civilisation owes to His teaching to be assured afresh that no one can seriously compete with Him for moral pre-eminence. Jesus Christ introduced a new spiritual impetus, seemingly different in kind, and not in degree

alone, from every other that the world has known.

Moreover, we must not fail to note one striking aspect of the sway which Jesus Christ has gained over mankind. His Person, and not merely His teaching, has drawn to itself the ardours of a most intense devotion through all the ages since He lived on earth. And among those who have thus loved Him, we find a majority of the greatest and the noblest among men. Criticism cannot assail this fact; it may offer various objections to the traditional inference; it may even go the length of asserting that the Christ who has thus moulded history is but a phantom of the myth-making imagination. But the fact, that the Christ depicted in the Gospels has exercised this influence, is indubitable. And this fact remains to be accounted for, to be correlated with other facts of the moral and spiritual experience of mankind. "What think ye of Christ?"—rings out a challenge which no man may shirk. Is it not strange, at least full of mysterious suggestiveness, that a personal influence should reach down thus through the centuries, and assert itself as of crucial import in the most intimate passages of our spiritual life?

When we come to examine more closely the character of Him who has thus impressed Himself on the conscience of the world, we discover seemingly incompatible elements exquisitely blended

into harmony. Humility and self-assertion, gentleness and uncompromising severity, are fused into the unity of matchless moral beauty. We venture to call this also an incontrovertible fact; for while individual critics, in the interest of an *a priori* theory, may consider one or another of these traits inconsistent with the temper which they would fain ascribe to Jesus Christ, the suffrage of the world is against them. The Christ who has won allegiance is the Christ of the Gospels, and not the sentimental peasant of M. Renan. Nor, be it said with all respect for a great and devout thinker, is He the cautiously humanitarian Jesus of Dr. Martineau. Some attempt must be made to account for the unparalleled moral beauty of Jesus Christ as portrayed in the Gospels. Is the record more likely to be the transcript of reality, or to be a fiction composed by various authors under the influence of unrestrained fancy and a blind enthusiasm?

Wonderful deeds are recorded as marking the life of Jesus Christ. One supreme triumph—that over death—has been accounted the final seal of His divine mission. However true it may be that, for us, Jesus Christ authenticates the miracles, and that standing alone they have lost much of their evidential value, yet even so, the rapid and all but universal belief in the Resurrection, conjoined with the striking fruits of that belief in the life and character of the first disciples, is

a fact which must be faced. Has any explanation yet been offered as rational, on the whole, as the acknowledgment that the record of His rising from the dead is an authentic historical narrative?

Again, we behold Jesus Christ fulfilling the hopes of Israel. The long expectation of the prophets is at last triumphantly vindicated in the establishment of the Church of the New Covenant. Is this a fortuitous happening, or does the conjunction of prophecy and fulfilment lend added weight to the claims of Christ? There is hardly need to protest, in these days, against that mistaken view which regards prophecy as a kind of magic art. It must be conceded, moreover, that modern criticism has discredited the traditional exegesis of many so-called Messianic passages in the Old Testament Scriptures. But no criticism can invalidate the fact of the irrepressible longing and looking-forward, the mysterious forecast of righteous king and victorious kingdom, which constitutes the essence of the Messianic consciousness of Israel. This hope was seemingly without warrant in outward circumstances, yet it persisted for centuries, and the event has justified it. A psychological fact, so unique in character, demands investigation. Jesus Christ, in turn, boldly prophesied concerning the future of His Church. Is there evidence to-day of a Kingdom of God in the world, which justifies

His teaching as to its perennial influence and assured triumph?

An Apologetic which proceeds on these lines may not hope, perhaps, to win brilliant logical victories. It will not vaunt itself as dispersing all doubts and difficulties. Many a mysterious problem will remain unsolved, many a countervailing argument imperfectly answered. But, at least, it may serve to show how unbelief is to be stirred out of its thoroughly unphilosophical dogmatism. And it may offer enough light to lead men to test for themselves, with greater confidence, those spiritual processes whereby alone the joy of an assured faith can be attained.

## CHAPTER IV

### JESUS CHRIST AND THE MORAL IDEAL

It will hardly be denied, by the most determined opponent of Christianity, that Jesus Christ holds a place of pre-eminent importance in the history of morals. But we are interested to define more exactly just what this admission involves. Is His pre-eminence unique, or is it only a relative pre-eminence? There have been many moral teachers who have illuminated ethics by flashes of rare and beautiful insight. There are moral and spiritual heroes, whose presence in the world has brought refreshment amidst the wastes of the commonplace, and who shine like lights in the darkness. Sometimes their words embody explicit teaching, which enlarges the sum total of ethical knowledge and broadens the horizon of duty. Sometimes the enthusiasm of their personal love of righteousness stirs the sluggish heart of humanity by the contagion of a splendid example. Under the touch of moral genius dead truths are quickened into life, and all the most ordinary events and circumstances become vibrant with heavenly significance. Is Jesus Christ to be

classed with these masters of righteousness, as singularly gifted indeed, but still only one among many, or does He stand alone?

The teaching and the example of Jesus Christ have moved men profoundly, but it is not in these alone that we recognise the secret of His power. The strongest appeal to the hearts of men lies in *Himself*, in the inexpressible graciousness of His Person. Holy men have often, it is true, aroused ardent devotion among their contemporaries. But here is a personal influence which the lapse of time seems powerless to dull, and which draws within its circle all sorts and conditions of men. We are impressed, moreover, with the fact that other moral teachers are, as it were, servants of the house, but He is as "a Son over God's house." We think of them as ennobled through their devoted zeal; the glory of the ideal, which they serve, is reflected in their life and character; it is greater than they, they partake of its greatness. But, in the case of Jesus Christ, the ideal seems one with the personality; we cannot separate between them. His character shines with its own intrinsic light; He is righteousness incarnate. Thus we instinctively judge. Whether this difference in our estimate be due merely to traditional associations, or be grounded in a real distinction, demands further inquiry. We can reach a satisfactory decision only when we have

examined more closely what we mean by the moral ideal, and have placed before ourselves, in sharper outline, the character of Him who has been esteemed, throughout the ages, the veritable Sun of righteousness.

Any prolonged discussion of the nature of conscience would take us too far from our immediate theme. But it is permissible to state broadly certain general truths. And this may help us to understand more clearly the relation of the character of Christ to that ideal which dominates our moral life.

It is manifest that we possess a faculty whereby we apprehend the good, just as we have a faculty by which we apprehend the true, and a faculty for apprehending the beautiful. Of course, all psychological analysis involves abstraction, and we are in danger of being misled by the very process whereby we seek to clear our thought. This holds true of any such mode of distinguishing between reason, conscience, and taste, as that adopted above. We must needs analyse our complex experience, but it is a crude mistake to conceive of human nature as though it were composed of a bundle of separate faculties. Perhaps we shall avoid confusion by a slight change of statement. Let us say that reality appeals to us under the three aspects of truth, beauty, and goodness; and, in our attempt to apprehend these different forms, we exercise faculties which

seem to be distinct, in that by no psychological process known to us can any one of them be derived from the others.

Meanwhile there is great value in thus correlating conscience and reason. For instance, the infallibility of conscience is a subject about which much discussion has been raised. Probably the simplest solution of the difficulty lies in recognising that its infallibility is strictly analogous to the infallibility of reason. We should hardly dare assert that reason is fallible, for thereby we should remove the one assurance of any certain knowledge upon which our whole trust in the essential verity of things is based. Yet men blunder in their reasoning constantly, and arrive at most erroneous conclusions. The word infallible is not a happy one in this connection. We must accept our intellectual constitution as substantially sound and trustworthy, or else fall into the hopeless circle of universal scepticism. But the premises upon which we exercise our reasoning faculty are imperfect, and hence the inferences which we draw from them will partake of the same imperfection. Similarly with conscience; the moral imperative rings out clear and unmistakable—there is a right and a wrong, and it is our bounden duty to do the right. But, in our particular judgments concerning right and wrong, our outlook is limited, our moral premises are inadequate; hence our conclusions must fall

short of perfection. It is plain that, as hampering restrictions of ignorance and wilfulness are removed, our moral judgments may be indefinitely clarified, and approximate ever more and more closely to the perfect standard: but, until we see face to face, and know even as we are known, something of imperfection will inhere in them.

Conscience, then, is to be regarded as a true guide, its dictates are as august and reverend as those of reason. But it is a faculty demanding careful cultivation, that barriers to its free exercise may be done away; and it may well look for light and leading to the masters of the spiritual life.

It is pertinent, in this connection, to point out that any theory as to the historic development of conscience cannot invalidate its present worth.[1] It may have been educated, at the first, along lines of utilitarianism; the well-being of the family or the clan may have been the occasion arousing its earliest monitions. None the less,

[1] "The doctrine of cumulation by inheritance can never help us to any genesis of moral faculty out of data that are unmoral. The transmission of improving aptitudes may render rapid and easy, processes which were slow and difficult; rich and intense, feelings that were poor and faint; immediate, perceptions that were mediate; abstract, cognitions that were concrete. But it cannot give what it does not contain; no induction, however wide and long, can yield us predicates never found in its particulars; and from an experience, be it of one generation or of a million, into which at one end only the sentient element enters, at the other nothing that is moral will come out."—MARTINEAU'S *Seat of Authority in Religion*, p. 99.

its present message of an absolute standard and an eternal obligation must be judged according to its own intrinsic value. We do not question the dignity and trustworthiness of reason, because the first steps of its evolution are to be traced in processes of exceeding humility. We acknowledge the validity of its dictates, from the first dim awakening of consciousness through sense-perception, on and up to its widest generalisations and profoundest philosophic thought. Organic growth is always to be judged by its final stages, and not by the germ from which it has originally sprung. As well take the acorn as embodying the full significance and value of the oak tree, as gauge the dignity and worth of conscience by the faint beginnings of altruistic sentiment enforced by the struggle for existence in primitive man. However relative and imperfect our moral judgments may be, there is no relativity in that voice within us which asserts the eternal distinction between right and wrong. As we reflect upon its universality, its tone of absoluteness, its persistency, we are more and more overwhelmed with the sense that we are touching one of the ultimate mysteries of human consciousness. It seems veritably a voice from another world, a message from the realm of eternal realities. It whispers to us of an origin and a destiny with which the fleeting appearances of earth are utterly incommensurate.

Moreover, the very fact of passing a moral judgment involves at least an implicit knowledge of an absolute standard, with which we compare special acts to determine whether they are right or wrong. It is the old truth, in one of its many applications, that the knowledge of a limit implies a virtual transcendence of the limit. If we can never entirely satisfy the demand of conscience by any multiplication of good deeds of which the finite will is capable, if we can always conceive a higher and more complete righteousness, must this not be because we have a vision of the perfect, though its glory blind like the sun, and we can fix our gaze only on its reflected light?

But the heart cannot rest content with a righteousness thus dimly outlined. We are ever seeking to render the ideal explicit, to embody it in concrete form. By successive moral judgments new elements of beauty are added. Every advance in personal holiness gives us a finer discernment and a clearer insight. The virtues which we behold in our fellows offer hints which we are quick to seize; and often, quite unconsciously, we add them to the picture of that righteousness which we set before us as a goal. These individual ideals, wrought out to sharpness of definition by each man for himself, will manifestly vary according to temperament, education, moral earnestness. One

man makes a hero of Napoleon, another of St. Francis of Assisi. Yet among good men —that is, men enamoured of righteousness— they will ever tend more or less toward a common type.

Now the fact of startling import is, that Jesus Christ alone has come within measurable distance of satisfying the moral ideal of all men. If the qualification implied in this form of expression seem at first to weaken its force, let it be remembered that accuracy is a more weighty factor in argument than rhetorical impressiveness. An unqualified generalisation is, in this case, incapable of proof, and therefore worthless. But this much would seem to be above challenge—Jesus Christ has met perfectly the moral needs of men of the most various character, in every station in life, during all the ages since He appeared on earth. In His presence they have felt, not that they beheld certain traits which helped to make clearer the dim vision of the perfect righteousness implicit in their hearts; rather, that in Him this inner standard found its one absolutely satisfying embodiment. So nearly universal is this experience, that probably no one who reads these pages has ever known a man who would avow that Jesus Christ failed thus to satisfy his moral sense. And if we meet with an arraignment of the Gospel—such as Zola's, for instance, when he cries that the world is weary of Christian

charity and athirst for justice—we instinctively feel that the impassioned protest springs from ignorance of what Christ really taught, and is, in effect, a plea for Christ, as against the travesty of His doctrine manifest in the lives of His professed disciples. For no other among the world's holiest can any such claim be remotely made. Great saints there are without number; heroes in every walk of life. But, not only are they the first to acknowledge their own shortcomings—which Christ alone among holy men never did—but the world is quick to detect some flaw, and accepts them as masters in the moral life only within strictly defined limits and with grave qualifications. Surely, it is not extravagant to say that this solitary pre-eminence of Jesus Christ is, on the whole, the most astonishing fact in the moral history of the world.

In studying the character of Christ as set forth in the Gospels, we should bear in mind that, at this point in the argument, the question is not raised as to the historic veracity of the portraiture. The Christ there depicted, whether legendary or historical, is the Christ who has won the heart of mankind, and, at present, it is this fact alone which engages our attention.

It does, indeed, make an untold difference whether Jesus Christ actually lived, whether

the sublime beauty of His character embodied itself in human deeds, or is the figment of man's imagination. We can feel nothing but amazement at the inconsequence of thought, when it is affirmed that, the Christ-idea having once found place in the world, it matters little whether the ideal has been realised or is only the goal toward which humanity moves. This attitude argues such complete absence of the historic sense, such utter incapacity to gauge the religious requirement of the human heart, that it may safely be ignored as the idiosyncrasy of a very transient phase of philosophic speculation.

But, until we clearly appreciate the full moral significance of the Gospel picture of the Christ, and of the hold which it has gained over the hearts of men, we are not in a position to weigh fairly the likelihood, as between the traditional and the destructive criticism of the records. In this lies one manifest element of weakness in the ordinary critical approach to the study of the Gospels. The vaunted absence of bias, so far from ensuring fairness, may be most subversive of just conclusions. The Gospels must be treated like any other literature, we are told. But what if they are essentially unlike any other literature? Then, to treat them thus is not philosophical but the reverse. This is not special pleading, it is only the reasonable

demand for a fair induction of facts upon which alone a truly scientific judgment can be based. In so far as our contention is substantiated, the Gospels differ from all other literature in that they contain the portraiture of One who has remoulded the moral and spiritual history of the world; not as Buddha and Mohammed have influenced vast numbers of the human race, but by dint of sheer moral beauty and the irresistible persuasiveness of His message. And this sway has been over the most enlightened; it has borne fruit in ameliorating all the conditions of civilised life; and to-day it is as potent for good as ever, and gives no sign of being outworn or yielding place to another. This does not mean that ordinary rules of criticism are inapplicable, or that this literature is to be regarded as, in such sense sacred, that to examine its documentary credentials savours of irreverence. But, to approach these books as though they were, in all respects, on a plane with others, would seem as uncritical a procedure as to account them magically perfect, and *a priori* above all cavil or question.

Any effort to analyse the character of Jesus Christ is bound to result in a thin and cold abstraction as compared with the living picture presented in the Gospel story. But the attempt may in some measure open our eyes to the abundant fulness of that portraiture, and

stir us to deeper admiration for the treasures of wisdom which it contains.[1]

The little phrase, descriptive of His work, "He went about doing good," strikes the key-note of His life. Gentleness and benevolence, above all else, distinguish the character of Jesus Christ. Graciousness and sympathy are stamped on all His words and actions, save when He is confronted with hypocrisy. To meet with suffering was to relieve it. The poor, the sick, the wretched were ever the special object of His solicitude. There is no slightest sign of that professionally philanthropic spirit, touched with self-consciousness and condescension, which mars so often our best efforts at unselfishness. His benevolence was like the shining of the sun, the pure effluence of self-forgetful love, spontaneous, natural, never-

[1] Any one who puts his hand to the task will surely echo the words of Bushnell, after he had attempted the treatment of this theme. (See *The Character of Jesus*, p. 65.) "Not to say that we are dissatisfied with this sketch, would be almost an irreverence, of itself, to the subject of it. Who can satisfy himself with anything that he can say of Jesus Christ? We have seen, how many pictures of the sacred person of Jesus, by the first masters: but not one among them all that did not rebuke the weakness which could dare attempt an impossible subject. So of the character of Jesus. It is necessary, for the holy interest of truth, that we should explore it as we are best able; but what are human thoughts and human conceptions on a subject that dwarfs all thought and immediately outgrows whatever is conceived. And yet, for the reason that we have failed, we seem also to have succeeded. For, the more impossible it is found to be, to grasp the character and set it forth, the more clearly it is seen to be above our range—a miracle and a mystery."

failing. The great problem of practical ethics is to escape the vicious circle of egotistic motive, to shift the spring of action from self to some nobler centre. We accomplish this, to a certain degree, within the narrow sphere of earthly affection. If we truly love a friend, self is forgotten in the joy of fellowship and service. But, even here, we dignify with the name of love that which is stained by much of earth's passion, and is very imperfect in its loyalty and devotion. But, with Jesus Christ, no egotistic centre is, in any measure, discernible. A complete disinterestedness marks the whole of His relationship with men.

> "Momentous to himself as I to me
> Hath each man been that ever woman bore;
> Once, in a lightning-flash of sympathy,
> I *felt* this truth, an instant, and no more." [1]

What is for us a mountain-top of experience, where we breathe for one brief moment the free air of heaven, only to descend again to the low level of earth's self-interest, was to Jesus Christ the habitual atmosphere of all His words and works. And this gentle considerateness showed itself in those circumstances where the severest test is put upon character. He was perfectly patient and cheerful under all the common trials of life. What we may call passive benevolence,

[1] *The Poems of William Watson*, p. 38.

as distinguished from active deeds of kindness, found perfect exemplification in Him.

Yet, with all this, there is absolutely no trace of unmanly softness. Indeed, such fervour of love, such ceaseless outflow of sustaining sympathy, were impossible save as conjoined with the strength and virility of the most consistent manhood. We have already had occasion to refer to that misapprehension of Christian love, which identifies it with alms-giving and the enervating exercise of indiscriminate mercy. In line with this is the onslaught of a socialistic writer, who exclaims: "The idea of a holy working-man is even grotesque. The virtues which the working classes, at their best, have recognised have been rather those of integrity, generosity, sincerity, good comradeship, than those of meekness, purity, piety, self-abnegation and the like."[1] In so far as this is aimed at the love manifested in the life of Jesus Christ, it misses its mark. That love is distinguished by just these virtues of integrity, generosity, sincerity, and comradeship. It is honest to the point of severity—witness the scathing arraignment of Scribes and Pharisees; or, again, the stern rebuke of His friends, when their spirit savoured not of the things which be of God. It is lavishly generous, even to utter self-sacrifice; He gave all, life itself, for His brethren. Its

[1] Quoted in *Apologetics*, by Alex. B. Bruce, p. 113.

comradeship knit the little band of friends to their Master by every tie of tenderest human affection, long before their eyes were fully opened to the high spiritual claims which rendered discipleship a duty. Justice is only the obverse side of love; the fire, which lights and warms, devours with pitiless zeal. Christ, cleansing the temple of its traffickers with a scourge of small cords, was still the loving Christ, redeeming holy things to holy uses, lest the children of the Kingdom suffer detriment.

The character of Jesus Christ is beautiful, also, by reason of its directness, naturalness, simplicity. These are always traits of true greatness. The small man instinctively seeks to guard himself by a factitious dignity; he needs the support of conventions and a certain amount of artificiality. The great man, on the contrary, is simply and unaffectedly *himself*, and not the reflection of other people's notions of propriety. Therefore it is that greatness, rising above the passing fashions of the hour, is of no special time or place; it has no provincial flavour; it is native to the whole world. This truth finds its highest exemplification in Jesus Christ. The title, Son of Man, which He took to Himself, is alone wide enough to express the universalism of His character. In His converse with men He is always absolutely direct, entangled by no subterfuges and equivocations. There is, indeed, the wisdom

which refuses to cast pearls before swine, the reticence which safeguards holy things from profanation. To test and strengthen faith, tenderness may for a moment assume the mask of severity, as in our Lord's dealing with the Syro-Phœnician woman. But there are no secondary motives, such as all too often render human intercourse tortuous and difficult.

M. Renan would have it that there are plain marks of deterioration toward the close of His career. He asserts that the life of Jesus had become complicated by the over-zealous enthusiasm of disciples, whose insistence that he should openly proclaim Himself Messiah entailed the playing of a part undreamed of in the earlier and happier days. And thus the pure idealism of the Galilean ministry, turned by the force of circumstances into an active propaganda, hopelessly entangled Him in the confusions of earth. The picture which this critic draws of the occasional roughness, the irritation, the bursts of impatience, the incomprehensibility, which characterise the Christ of the later record, is rhetorically effective. But, when we examine his references, we are puzzled to conjecture the authority on which the delineation is based. As Mr. Hutton well says, in commenting on this criticism of Renan's: "Probably, there is no period in His life which is so fully penetrated with the divine sunlight of His tenderness as the

period immediately before and during the last parting with the twelve. If tradition has any chronological value at all, that period—when the box of ointment was shed upon Him, when He wept over the doomed city, when He warned Peter of his coming fall, washed the feet of His disciples, told the daughters of Jerusalem not to weep for Him, though the cross was even then being set up before His eyes, but to weep for themselves and for their children, and finally prayed for forgiveness on His enemies—was not a period of zeal withering all human ties, and putting Him beyond the plane of nature, but of marvellous and surpassing love, such as could not possibly be matched in our accounts of the Galilean period. M. Renan's attempt to trace a history of gradual absorption into an idea, of a dizzied brain, and enthusiasm almost drying up the fountains of human charity, has not even the shadow of a foundation."[1]

The serene courage of Jesus Christ in the midst of danger and suffering is as conspicuous as the gentleness and charm of His character. Courage is the distinguishing characteristic of the hero—on this we are all agreed; but, though the virtue be much lauded, very crude notions are current as to what constitutes true courage. Some still cling to the traditional type, which is found amidst the dust and din of battle, and confound

[1] *Theological Essays*, by Richard H. Hutton, p. 308.

courage with deeds of physical daring. This is childish; yet perhaps few of us have shaken ourselves completely free from the crass associations which cling to the word in the popular mind. Insensibility often apes the outward guise of courage; and, in estimating the moral worth of a brave deed, it is needful to give weight to the delicacy of organisation—the nicely-poised body and mind—which must be nerved by the will to meet the awful odds arrayed in opposition. Jesus Christ was of the most sensitive temperament, open to every slightest motion of sympathy or antagonism, capable of the keenest joy and the intensest anguish. Sin blunts the edge of susceptibility—drags the body down, dulling its power of quick response. What, then, must have been the sensitiveness to joy and pain of One who was without sin! If objection be made that we are here assuming the truth of a theological proposition, and that it is not proved that Jesus was immaculate, we must again insist that we are now interested only in the picture of the Christ as drawn in the Gospels, and are not at present concerned about its correspondence with historic fact. The character, which has won the hearts of men, is sinless, and His courage, as set forth in the Gospels, must be judged from this point of view. Again, courage is often fostered by the fact that men are blind to the full measure of the risks incurred, be this blindness due

to unavoidable ignorance, or to determined shutting of the eyes to danger. Jesus Christ foresaw with perfect clearness the powers arrayed against Him, yet walked to meet His fate with calm and unwavering constancy. Nothing can surpass the majestic dignity of His action, whether before His judges, or when in agony on the Cross amidst the crowd of scoffing foes.

But the picture of the Passion would have lost much of its attractive power had this been all, had there been no sign of that shrinking, which is the common heritage of all men, when the darkness of earth's last agony is closing in. The scene in the garden, the cry to the Father for escape, if this were possible, so far from detracting from the courage of Jesus Christ, add the note, which else were wanting, to prove His perfect manhood. Stoicism is not the highest kind of courage. We are powerless to fathom the depth of that agony. The cup from which He shrank was not merely the physical anguish of the scourging and the Cross. The mysterious burden of the whole world's sin and failure was pressing hard upon Him. The awful travail of Gethsemane, then, ending as it does in the serenity of heavenly trust and unfaltering purpose, perfects the impression of His consummate courage. Doubtless it was the absoluteness of His faith in the Father, the triumphant assurance that right reigns supreme, which sustained

our Lord and raised Him above all earth's disquietudes. But, even though we were driven to doubt whether that faith can be justified, this would not make the resultant action less inspiring; the fruits of faith, in the character of Jesus Christ, would still be noble and beautiful.

There is always tonic force in a well-grounded confidence, in the manful assurance that one's work is worthy and destined to issue in successful accomplishment. It gives the requisite uplift to character, without which a man can never be the centre of large influence and a leader among men. Jesus Christ had come to found a Kingdom; its honours and privileges were not such as make appeal to the carnal heart. All the powers of the world were arrayed against it. The means which lay to hand seemed totally inadequate to the design. Yet never once did Jesus Christ flinch in the face of difficulties—there could be no difficulties for such faith as His. The triumph of the Kingdom was as certain as that God rules. And always the light of that hope illuminates His face, which shines with the beauty of assured success. The glamour of over-confidence is quickly dissipated by the event; failure brings confusion to lofty plans and ambitious promises. But history has put its seal of approval on the confidence of Jesus Christ; and the mustard seed of the parable has grown to "the greatest among herbs," giving shelter to all the birds of the air.

Thus the character of Jesus Christ, howsoever derived, be it the dream of men or drawn from actual experience, is adorned with every grace calculated to win our allegiance—the one perfect character of which we have record. And, although we shall have occasion to return to it later, it is worth our while to notice the fact here, that in all respects, so far as the human character of Jesus Christ is concerned, there is perfect consistency in the four Gospels which profess to give account of His life.

This statement may, at first, seem to require some slight modification; one or two incidents related have been held, by certain critics, to derogate from the dignity of Christ. But it is only necessary to name them, to see the triviality of the objection. The blasting of the barren fig-tree ceases to be wanton destruction in view of the awful parabolic significance pointing to the rejection of unfruitful Israel. And the violent death of the Gadarene swine, while presenting, it may be, greater difficulties, hardly seems to warrant the weight of argument which has been laid upon it, when we consider that it was incidental to the restoration of manhood to the demoniac. We cannot allow that the exhibitions of burning zeal, already adverted to—the cleansing of the Temple, and the denunciation of Scribes and Pharisees—fall under this category. Objection to these implies an utter failure to appreciate the importance of

the issues at stake, and the spiritual significance of the crisis. Only a weak and sentimental love finds no place for righteous indignation. Indeed, the shifts to which objectors are driven, and the paucity of words or acts which can remotely be made the subject of adverse criticism, go to prove the accuracy of our contention that the picture presented is wonderful in its harmony and consistency, that the world is right in esteeming it the portraiture of the Perfect Man.

When we try to account for this unique moral development, and, to this end, examine the historic circumstances and antecedents of Jesus Christ, it becomes all the more astonishing. It is true that He sprang from a nation whose peculiar mission it was to bear witness to righteousness. Whatever may be the results of modern criticism as to the details of their history, we know that the Hebrews, alone among the nations of antiquity, worshipped a God of righteousness, from the earliest dawn of national consciousness. At the first, the conception of righteousness was grievously imperfect. Israel was not exempt from those laws of growth which condition all God's dealing with men. But the highest moral standard known was imputed to Jehovah, and thus the Hebrew religion, in contrast with the history of other religious cults, was never outgrown by the advancing ethical enlightenment of its best minds. All such moral advancement

was immediately assimilated by the religious consciousness, and served to enlarge and purify the teaching concerning the divine righteousness.[1] Amidst all the shortcomings of Israel's leaders, amidst the gross corruptions of its popular life, a wholesome moral sentiment was always reasserting itself. Might we not expect, then, that ere long this wonderful people would produce, by entirely natural processes, the most striking moral genius of the world's history?

When, however, we come to compare Jesus Christ with the noblest of His forerunners, the contrast only accentuates the solitary grandeur of His character. We need but to mention David, Jeremiah, Isaiah, St. John the Baptist, to feel with overwhelming force that, whatever the splendour of their attainment, they cannot in any degree be placed in rivalry with Jesus Christ. They are distinctly national, He is universal. They are notable for some special virtue, or combination of virtues, He is the exponent of all virtue. They stir our admiration, He demands our love. This gulf is one that can be bridged by no theory of moral evolution. The perfection of Jesus Christ stands without earthly antecedents; finite differences, as between Hebrew and Gentile, disappear in the presence of the infinite. Even His teaching does not reflect the excellence

[1] Comp. Aubrey Moore's Essay in *Lux Mundi*, on "The Christian Doctrine of God."

of the past. The morality of the Chosen People itself is transformed in His hands. The Sermon on the Mount is essentially new. If certain of its aphorisms are to be discovered in ancient codes, Jewish or heathen, the spirit which breathes through it, and the total moral outlook, are such as to constitute a new beginning in the religious history of the race.

Strauss attempted to reconstruct the Gospel, along the lines of the mythical theory, by showing how each feature of the narrative is built up out of hints taken from the Old Testament. Incidents culled from the story of some national hero, passages from ancient prophecy, current apocalyptic notions, these, as offering fit material for a life of the Messiah, are supposed to have been seized upon and worked into the memoir by the eager activity of the myth-making imagination. Much ingenuity was expended in elaborating this theory in prolix detail, and fitting the whole Gospel record into the framework of the earlier literature. But entirely apart from the quite arbitrary assumption that thus only can coincidences be explained, no account whatsoever was taken of the one phenomenon which, above all others, calls for explanation. By no cleverest device can the character and teaching of Jesus Christ, as contained in the Gospels, be evolved out of a patchwork of literary quotations. Strauss' argument may seem formidable, with its

apparent candour and long array of learned citations, until we discover that it is a virtual begging of the question from beginning to end. It owed its entire plausibility to an ignoring of the moral and spiritual values upon which alone the unique claim of the Gospel story rests.

The originality and catholicity of Jesus Christ become the more conspicuous when we consider them with reference to the immediate environment of His earthly life. The heroic days of the nation were past. The voice of prophecy had been silent for centuries. The decadence of religion was marked by the scrupulousness of Pharisaic observance, the hair-splitting subtleties of the Rabbinic schools, the worldliness and unbelief of the Sadducees. At no time had Judaism sunk to a lower ebb, if we have regard to the true standards of spirituality. Even the friends and immediate followers of Jesus, though we must believe them to have been chosen in part, at least, because of their moral and religious susceptibility, evince again and again the narrowest Jewish prejudice and strange obtuseness to the meaning of His words. Only slowly and painfully did they assimilate the spirit of Jesus Christ. And not until after the Resurrection do they manifest any full appreciation of the greatness of His mission, and the revolutionary character of His doctrine.

No forerunner nor contemporary can come

into comparison with Jesus Christ; but we might expect that some among His later followers would equal, if they did not surpass Him, in moral attainment. He initiated a mighty advance; showed clearly, by example, the way of holiness. But wisdom has accumulated with the ages. The vantage-ground from which later generations have started ought to have insured the highest achievement. And we find that, among the saints, there has been no lack of ardour in following His footsteps. Men have toiled with ceaseless devotion to reproduce His righteousness. Wonderful holiness has been attained; prodigies of self-sacrifice have been accomplished in His Name. Yet, ever above them all, towers the figure of Jesus Christ. The progress of the saints seems infinitesimal when compared with the distance which separates them from the Master whom they serve.

What can be the meaning of this supreme height scaled at one bound; this leadership invested with the awful majesty of the moral law itself; this man, Jesus Christ, offered as the goal toward which we are to press with tireless feet? To use the word genius, as though it were a key to unlock the riddle, is to argue in a circle. It is always easy, but somewhat unprofitable, to choose a word of indeterminate meaning, and then stretch it to cover what we will. We have only first to insert what we afterwards

deduce from it. There are moral laws, affecting the development of character, just as rigid as the laws which hold in the material world. Reason can rest satisfied with no verbal quibble, but must ever seek honestly to unravel the mystery of those laws in application to the character of Jesus Christ.[1]

The influence of Jesus Christ on the world has been commensurate with the place which has been assigned Him in the ethical scale. The testimony of Mr. Lecky to this point is all the more impressive from the fact that he cannot be charged with excess of sympathy with the Christian position. In his *History of European Morals* (vol. ii. p. 8) he says: "It was reserved for Christianity to present to the world an ideal character which, through all the changes of eighteen centuries, has filled the hearts of men with an impassioned love, and has shown itself capable of acting on all ages, nations, temperaments, and conditions; has not

[1] "Nothing has been more common in this controversy, whenever unbelievers are beset by difficulties, than to ascribe every fact connected with Jesus which cannot be accounted for on ordinary principles, to the influence of genius. Thus, in endeavouring to account for the mighty influence which He has exerted in history, and for the elevation of His teaching and character, it is found to be a ready way of escape from all difficulties to say that it was due to His exalted genius. This, however, is really equivalent to the admission that it has been due to a force for which we are unable to account, and that a power has manifested itself in Him of a character wholly different from those which energise in ordinary humanity."—C. A. Row, *Christian Evidences viewed in relation to Modern Thought*, p. 135, note.

only been the highest pattern of virtue, but the highest incentive to its practice, and has exerted so deep an influence, that it may be truly said that the simple record of three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and to soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers, and than all the exhortations of moralists. This has indeed been the well-spring of whatever has been best and purest in the Christian life. Amid all the sins and failings, amid all the priestcraft, the persecution, and fanaticism which have defaced the Church, it has preserved in the character and example of its Founder an enduring principle of regeneration."[1]

We cannot rest content that this moral ideal should stand alone, unsupported and unexplained; that this unique influence of Jesus Christ should be simply recognised as a fact, without attempt to justify it to the reason. Such indifference were to renounce our birthright as rational beings, and that in a matter of crucial importance, involving the most serious practical interests of the human race.

[1] Quoted by Row in his *Christian Evidences*, p. 96.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DIVINE CLAIM OF CHRIST

When we have acknowledged the unique moral pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, another question begins to force itself upon us. Is it reasonable to accept Him as a moral guide, and ignore His words the moment that they pass beyond the simplest admonitions concerning conduct? Many are content to do this, but it is surely at the expense of intellectual consistency.

The moral and spiritual are closely interwoven. If any vision of divine things be possible, righteousness must clarify the eye for beholding it. This fact plainly raises a presumption in favour of any religious message which Jesus Christ may utter, a presumption strong enough to induce us to ponder carefully whatever He may say concerning God and His relation to men. If there be an antecedent probability that God will reveal Himself, where should we look for the clearest revelation if not to that meeting-point of heaven and earth, the loftiest righteousness of which we have record in history?

To reason thus is certainly to pass beyond the

limits of the inductive method, and therefore the argument is not put forward as having weight, save as facts are found which unmistakably substantiate it. But even the most exclusive advocate of induction may grant this reasoning a place among those guesses which not infrequently guide us toward lines of fruitful experiment. Our attention is legitimately aroused, and we feel bound to examine with minutest care all the phenomena allied with that exhibition of supreme virtue which we have discovered in the life and character of Jesus Christ. If, as a result of such examination, it be found that Christ Himself grounded His authority in a unique relationship with the Father; if it appear that the ethical and religious elements of His teaching cannot be divorced without seriously impairing the integrity of His whole message; this will have advanced us to a new stage in the argument, and a choice of singular importance and difficulty will have been forced on us.

It cannot be denied, however, that curiously strong prejudices are arrayed against even a fair-minded consideration of the divine claim of Jesus Christ. To state the thesis is often to arouse irreconcilable antagonism. It is not so much a question of securing candid examination of the evidence as of winning a respectful hearing. By many this hostile attitude is frankly avowed. In other cases it takes the form of a silent, undefined

as thus viewed, are totally distinct entities, with superficial kinship only. The image of God, in which man was created, can mean nothing more than a faint resemblance to the divine, mysteriously impressed on human thought and will. We are God's children, figuratively, in that He treats us with something of paternal consideration; but, that there is such congruity between His nature and ours, that the human and the divine are capable of essential union, must be regarded as utterly impossible. The man-becoming of God is intrinsically absurd; for God and man are mutually exclusive terms, in such sense, that were Christ divine He could not be human, while the assertion that He is man negatives the possibility that He is God.

It may be difficult to formulate the opposing view so as to escape the appearance of an undue emphasis upon the immediacy of God's presence, which lays itself open to the charge of pantheism. It is the function of faith to fuse the seeming contradiction of God's transcendence and His immanence; it is doubtful whether the intellect alone is competent to the task. But against this arbitrary divorce between the divine and the human, this separateness of creation which tends to reduce God to an abstraction, all the profounder thought of the world raises a voice of protest. To yield assent to it is not only to cast scorn upon the deepest insight of philosopher and poet, but

to do despite to the imperative demands of the religious consciousness of mankind.

Can it be that, at times, a deep moral distaste reinforces this deistic tendency of the intellect? There is awfulness in the thought; but it is conceivable that it should be pleasanter, as well as easier, to banish God to a distant heaven, rather than to believe that He has invaded the intimacies of earth. Man is flattered by a sense of exclusive possession; he would lay claim, at least, to the ownership of this little planet, reserve one tiny plot from the disturbing intrusion of the divine. It lends an almost terrible sacredness to common things if God has indeed dwelt as man among men. This human nature of ours, thus dignified, must needs be treated with an exceeding reverence. Life can no longer be regarded as the easy-going venture which men of relaxed moral fibre find most in accord with their desires. Men *will* not believe, because belief involves the abandonment of that attitude of moral indifference which consists most naturally with the full enjoyment of purely earthly compensations. The individual may be quite unconscious of the moral bearing of this deep-seated antagonism to the divine claim of Christ; it may show itself merely as an instinctive repugnance, and seem to spring solely from intellectual causes. But, in view of the bitter animosity aroused by Christ, both during His earthly life and again and again in after-history,

it does not seem possible to deny that there is such a thing as a hatred of the light.[1]

To meet these demands to be freed from the burden of acknowledging Christ as divine, a theory has been proposed which claims to account, on purely natural grounds, for the phenomena exhibited in the Gospels. Jesus was possessed, we are told, of a rare and penetrating spiritual genius. Such was the fascination of His personality that legends quickly gathered round Him when once He had passed from earth. The enthusiastic love of His disciples endowed Him with superhuman powers and attributes. When we add to this that the Messianic idea, which prevailed among the Jews at the time, had been gathering definiteness for centuries, and that the characteristic traits of the traditional Messiah lay ready at hand to be applied to Jesus the moment that His followers became convinced that He was the long-expected Redeemer of Israel, we are supposed to have all the data requisite for the explanation of the divine character attributed to Him in the Gospel story. Thus, the Christ of Scripture tradition is essentially a mythical figure, behind which lies the historic Jesus ; but we can know little with certainty concerning the latter, save the negative proposition, that He was *not* divine.

[1] Comp. J. B. Mozley's essay on Blanco White in *Essays Historical and Theological.*

The growth of myths is a subject requiring great delicacy and acumen in the handling, if we are to arrive at conclusions which are more than the subjective impressions of the individual investigator. The fact that myths develop under certain conditions is indubitable, but the genesis and method of that development are elusive when we try to formulate a definite theory. It is not enough simply to utter the word "mythical," and fancy that thereby we have satisfactorily explained a wide-spread belief and proved that it has no claim whatsoever on our credence. Amidst much that is uncertain one thing seems plain, a myth must require a considerable length of time before it can so enwrap the nucleus of historic fact as totally to obscure its original features. Now, without discussing here the probable date of the Four Gospels, we have testimony concerning Jesus Christ which all critics agree in dating within thirty years of the Crucifixion, namely, the four unquestioned Epistles of St. Paul, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans. The picture of the Christ contained in these Epistles is drawn incidentally, but this fact renders it more rather than less significant. And, when we examine that picture, we find it completely consonant with the divine-human Christ of the Gospel story. St. Paul's testimony has many and important consequences; but, at this point, we use it merely as fixing a

limit to the period in which the assumed mythical conception of the Christ must have been developed. This period was that in which most of the personal friends and followers of Jesus were still alive, and we must suppose that the very men who had known Him most intimately in the daily converse of His earthly life were among the active agents in the propagation of a mythical conception of His Person. This certainly puts a great strain on the theory, and we are obliged to credit the founders of the Church, who appear to have been men of unusual practical ability and intelligence in other respects, with an extraordinary credulity in this one matter of crucial importance.

Strauss met this argument with the following plea: "A frequently raised objection remains, . . . namely, that the space of about thirty years, from the death of Jesus to the destruction of Jerusalem, during which the greater part of the narratives must have been formed; or even the interval extending to the beginning of the second century, the most distant period which can be allowed for the origin of even the latest of these Gospel narratives and for the written composition of our Gospels;—is much too short to admit of the rise of so rich a collection of myths. But, as we have shown, the greater part of these myths did not arise during that period, for their first foundation was laid in the legends

of the Old Testament, before and after the Babylonish exile; and the transference of these legends, with suitable modifications, to the expected Messiah, was made in the course of the centuries which elapsed between that exile and the time of Jesus. So that, for the period between the formation of the first Christian community and the writing of the Gospels, there remains to be effected only the transference of Messianic legends, almost all ready formed, to Jesus, with some alterations to adapt them to Christian opinions, and to the individual character and circumstances of Jesus; only a very small proportion of myths having to be formed entirely new."[1] But is not this explanation an evasion of the central difficulty? It may, by possibility, be held as covering such stories as those given by St. Matthew and St. Luke, concerning the birth and early years of our Lord. But it does not account for the divine self-assertion which is consistently attributed to Jesus Christ throughout the Gospels; nor has the argument any bearing on the Resurrection, the myth, according to this theory, which above all others needs to be accounted for.

Moreover, we must not overlook the fact that Incarnation was an essentially new concept in the world. There had been foreshadowings in the theophanies and deifications which abound

[1] Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, Eng. trans., p. 86.

in ethnic religions, especially in those of an Oriental type. But the man-becoming of God, in the sense in which the Church has understood the revelation of God in Christ, was new in religious thought.[1] The strict and jealous monotheism of the Jews was seemingly the most uncongenial soil in which any such conception could arise. It is more than doubtful whether the picture of the Messiah contained in the prophets, or that current in the popular imagination, can be said to have anticipated this feature of Christian doctrine. There must have been some adequate cause for so startlingly paradoxical a development. It will be denied by many that the doctrine of Incarnation, as developed in later theology, is contained in the original records. But the Church claims that it is the legitimate unfolding of that which lies implicit in the direct assertions of Jesus Christ concerning Himself, and in the Christology of St. Paul. An advance along such absolutely new theological lines, so complete a remoulding of the metaphysical basis of monotheism, which has also held its own, and been reaffirmed rather than discredited by subsequent philosophic thought, is, to say the least, one of the most striking achievements of the human mind. It is by no means evident that man's myth-making propensity is equal to such an effort. And it seems less

[1] See Dorner's *Person of Christ*, Introduction.

reasonable to regard this doctrine as a baseless speculation, spun out of the stores of human ingenuity, than to acknowledge that it was derived from elements in the character of Jesus which point plainly to His being more than man.[1]

The rock on which the mythical theory, in its various forms, ultimately wrecks itself is the attempt to find in history the hypothetical human Christ, stripped of the divine attributes with which He is invested in the Gospels. Whatever may be the trustworthiness of the New Testament records, they are our only source of information concerning the life and character of Jesus Christ. If we find that the picture there presented is an indissoluble unity; that, abstracting all that savours of the supernatural, we have but a dim and shadowy figure left, without clearness of outline, or force and consistency of character—then it will be plain that we must accept all or abandon all. That method is more nearly allied to romance than criticism which rejects what it dislikes, and then reconstructs out of the inner consciousness a Christ to suit its own predilections, and offers this to the world as substitute for Him who has won all the victories of the Christian ages. In view of the intellectual ability

[1] For a Unitarian statement of the implications of the divine self-assertion of Christ, hardly to be distinguished from the orthodox view of His Person, see *The Fourth Gospel the Heart of Christ*, Part IV., chap. ii., by E. H. Sears.

and the honesty of many who are open to this charge, we may hesitate to impute critical inconsequence. But it is possible for the humblest to study the picture of Jesus Christ in the Gospels, and decide whether or not it exhibits a unity that welds together the divine and human elements in such manner that to sever them is to destroy the only Christ whom we can know.

Again, if the contention were well founded that the Messianic claim was foisted upon Christ by the enthusiasm of His disciples, or the wonder-loving imagination of a later generation, we should expect that some trace of imperfect workmanship would be discernible in the picture which is drawn of Him in the Gospels. It might well task the mightiest genius to produce, in the region of pure romance, a figure which should successfully combine the opposing characteristics of utter self-abnegation and supreme self-assertion. But what shall we say of the difficulties when the self-assertion is to be superimposed upon a character which, according to this hypothesis, must have been most antithetic to all such blunders of an overweening pride? The Evangelists, at whatever time they wrote, are free from all literary sophistication; at least, this is manifestly true of the Synoptists. The narrative, in their pages, bears the unmistakable signs of good faith. Might we not look, then—if, indeed, two

incompatible elements entered into the tradition —for occasional evidences of the latent opposition; inconsistencies in the words and acts of Jesus; an impression of complexity, as though the character were woven of materials not always homogeneous? But the reverse is the case. We find in Him simplicity and an absence of egotism, combined with the most astonishing self-assertion. Here is an ethical marvel which confounds all previous theories as to the possibilities of human nature. Never man spake as this Man, claiming all authority in heaven and earth; yet when words fall from His lips, which, in another, would be proof of inexcusable audacity, we feel that it is the same lowly Jesus who is among men as one that serves. No slightest sense of incongruity disquiets us. In His humblest acts He is Lord of all; in the most majestic we are awed by His humility.

We have but to turn to our own experience to realise how unparalleled is the moral problem which here confronts us. There may be times when duty calls us to self-assertion, when we feel obliged to lay emphasis on our rights and to demand submission. But on these occasions how difficult it is to preserve, in any measure, the finer qualities of meekness and self-forgetfulness. The necessity forced upon us threatens our higher spiritual interests, and, should this temper become habitual, we know that nothing

could save us from moral deterioration. But in Christ there is no conflict; the moods do not alternate, but each interpenetrates the other. The humility and the self-assertion are both, at all times, integral to the inmost character.

In this connection it is impossible to omit all reference to the mighty works which are recorded as having been wrought by Jesus Christ. They stand in close relation to His divine claim, and fall under the same critical strictures as the words in which He set forth His Messianic authority and mission. We do not now ask whether the miracles are intrinsically credible; we take them merely as forming a part of the Gospel story. And, in this view, it cannot be denied that they are surprisingly in harmony with the general presentation of our Lord's character and work. We do not propose to rest any weight whatever, at this point, on the evidential value of miracles. We are at present studying the Christ as He is represented in the Gospels, without raising the question of their historical accuracy. Our only claim is that the world has found the character of Christ beautiful with all moral perfections. This character, in the only form in which it can be known by us, combines with its humility and gentleness astonishing traces of divine prerogative and authority. The combination is effected in such manner that it leaves on the mind no sense of incongruity; the whole picture is harmonious

and convincing. Having advanced thus far, there is ample warrant, in the pursuance of the inductive method, for examining the miracles as recorded facts, with the purpose of ascertaining whether or not they are congruous with what we have already discovered in the Gospel picture of Jesus Christ.

In any such examination we are immediately impressed by the ethical quality of these miracles. For the most part they are connected with deeds of mercy, and in all cases they are worthy of the dignity of Him who is said to have worked them. It is further remarkable that they are never performed in His own behalf. There is a striking absence of the puerility and inconsequence of similar narratives, appearing for instance, in the Apocryphal Gospels. This contrast has been emphasised so often that it is needless to particularise; but the triteness of the illustration should not blind us to the extraordinary impressiveness of the fact. The Gospel miracles fall as naturally into their place in the narrative, as do the parables or the ordinary words and acts of Jesus. They are perfectly in accord with what we should expect Him to do, if once it be granted that such events are in themselves conceivable.

It is hardly necessary to say that all this does not prove that the record is accurate. What it does prove, however, is that some very re-

markable influence must have prevailed, so to guide and restrain the compilers of the Gospels, that their work should be thus differentiated from all other literature which deals with the miraculous. Once again, we are struck with the consistency of the portraiture. What exceeding subtlety of touch is this, which can bring the figure of Jesus Christ, in all its moral grandeur, into close relation with deeds which we commonly associate with the false pretences of magic, and still rouse within us no protest, nor sully the immaculate purity of His character!

We find, moreover, that Jesus alone, in the New Testament, is represented as performing miracles in His own name. Others call upon God, or perform them in the name of Jesus; He commands, and the powers of nature are obedient to His dictate. Even where, as in the raising of Lazarus, there is mention of a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father, when the cry, "Lazarus, come forth," awakes the dead, it is the voice of divine authority which alone is heard. Whether the traditions upon which the Evangelists construct their narrative be historically trustworthy or not, they are in all these particulars absolutely consistent. This is certainly not the usual characteristic of the unrestrained workings of popular fancy. The fact is noteworthy in itself, and becomes all the more significant when taken in connection with the

other phenomena of the Gospels upon which we have been dwelling.

The unity of the character of Jesus Christ, before and after the Resurrection, deserves more attention than has usually been bestowed upon it. We might naturally have expected, if the story of the Resurrection were mythical, that prodigies of power, reflected splendours of the heavenly triumph, would obscure in some degree the merely human features of His character. Here surely was opportunity for extravagant embellishment, if the writers were the credulous slaves of a popular superstition. It is true that the risen Christ appears in the Gospels, superior to some of the limitations incident to the natural body. He manifests Himself to His disciples, mysteriously indifferent to physical barriers, and seems at will to veil their eyes so that they may see yet not know Him. But the moment that He opens His lips, the words which fall from them are exactly such as have always characterised His discourse—full of simplicity and loving sympathy with the affairs of men. There is no new revelation concerning the mysteries of the future, no message to satisfy curiosity, no assumption of new powers and authority. There is, if possible, a touch of added tenderness apparent. The tone in which He utters her name reveals Him to Mary at the sepulchre; the threefold question to St. Peter, lingering

longingly over the assurance of his fealty and devotion; the benediction of peace with which He greets the assembled disciples; the almost wistful tone of wonder wherewith He upbraids the two disciples on the way to Emmaus for their slowness of heart; the gentleness of rebuke implied in yielding to the weakness of St. Thomas' faith, and offering the physical proof which he demanded; these are but illustrations of the exquisite naturalness that marks the history of the Resurrection life, bringing it into harmony with the character displayed throughout the entire ministry.

It may seem to some that these descriptive touches are very inadequate, in view of the celestial enlightenment which might well be demanded from one who has risen from the dead. The Scripture, indeed, asserts that He instructed His disciples in matters pertaining to the Kingdom, which are not further specified. And this instruction was doubtless their guide in the accomplishment of their later work. But the point of interest, which now engages us, is that such reserve should distinguish the account. For, according to the thesis of unbelief, the whole realm of fancy was open to the compilers, whence they might have drawn such material as would best suit man's unbridled curiosity and his insatiate thirst for wonders. Christian tradition has, moreover, always laid stress on what Christ was and did, as the foundation of the Church's

hope, quite as much as upon His explicit teaching. And this goes far to explain the paucity of the post-resurrection discourses of our Lord in the New Testament.

It remains for us to examine, with somewhat greater care, a few of the recorded instances of Christ's claim to divine authority. It is a mistake to suppose that this aspect of our Lord's character is mainly dependent for illustration on the proof-texts commonly quoted. It is rather the underlying tone of all His words, the atmosphere pervading all His works, which carry conviction.

The wonderful summary of Christ's moral teaching, given in St. Matthew's Gospel (chaps. v.–vii.), is often esteemed common ground on which those who accept and those who deny the supernatural claim of the Gospel can meet. It may be doubted whether the unstinted admiration, lavished by unbelievers on this utterance of Jesus Christ, would survive a more painstaking study. The code of ethics there enunciated is rather revolutionary, even after nineteen hundred years of professed allegiance; and it is almost as hard to formulate a theoretical justification of the precepts on naturalistic grounds, as it is practically to fulfil them. But, viewed historically, with due appreciation of the circumstances of their first utterance, the words are a startling revelation of the personal claim put forward by Christ.

Bear in mind the sacredness of the law of Moses, the absoluteness of authority possessed by every trivial precept which could boast his sanction, and then listen to the uncompromising "I say unto you," whereby He abrogated the traditional standard which held undisputed sway.[1] To find a parallel to the claim of Christ, it would be necessary to conceive of a moral teacher to-day, who should boldly set himself against the highest known standard of contemporary ethics; who should announce, as a dictum beyond appeal, his own intuition of righteousness, basing his claim on no other argument than an unqualified statement of his individual authority. We need hardly ask what measure of respect would be meted out to such presumption. Yet this is exactly the tone assumed by Jesus Christ in His initial discourse on the fundamental prin-

[1] St. Matt. v. 17–20 might seem inconsistent with this unqualified statement. The composite character of the whole discourse, as we find it in St. Matthew, has led some to conclude that we have here an instance of two conflicting lines of tradition. But it is hardly necessary to have recourse to this hypothesis in order to explain the apparent discrepancy. The fulfilment of the law, as apprehended by Jesus Christ, was in itself of such a character as to seem to the Jews utterly subversive of their traditional righteousness. In verse 19 it is plainly "the moral laxity which seeks to evade an acknowledged duty" that Christ condemns. And verse 20 puts the seal of His condemnation on the highest ideal of righteousness prevalent among His hearers. We know, moreover, that Christ recognised a degree of accommodation in Mosaic ordinances, which allowed of a restatement scarcely to be distinguished from abrogation. (Comp. St. Matt. xix. 7 *ff.*)

ciples of His Kingdom. If we are no longer startled by the novelty of His doctrine, this may be due in part to the fact, that wont and usage have dulled our ears to His words. But familiarity should not veil from us the originality of a Teacher who dealt with the moral law as its master, promulgating decrees with the authoritativeness of Jehovah on Mount Sinai.

As Jesus Christ wrought miracles in His own name; as He assumed a position of unique authority with regard to the law; so He made it plain that His relation to the Father is to be clearly distinguished from that of all others. Jesus Christ came to proclaim the Fatherhood of God. This truth, which had been dimly guessed and falteringly uttered, received in Him a sanction which has made it the good news of God to men. We are God's sons, even when wandering in a far country, hungering for the husks which the swine eat. The tenderest solicitude in the heart of the Eternal God yearns over us, eager to welcome us with a Father's abounding joy, if we will but turn our faces homeward. Jesus Christ prefaces the prayer given to His disciples with "Our Father," and thereby bids men recognise the bond of brotherhood, binding them together in one family. Yet invariably, in the Gospels, when speaking of God in relation to Himself, He names Him "My Father," never "Our Father." There could be

no fuller fellowship with men than that realised in Jesus Christ. He calls them not servants but friends; they are His brethren, even when most degraded and erring. Yet there ever remains the sharp line of demarcation. His sonship is not perfectly shared by us. There is a unique relationship between Him and the Father, into which no created being can intrude. Even the passage which has been wrested to a denial of Christ's divinity, where He explicitly says, "My Father is greater than I,"[1] would seem rather to accentuate the distinction than to obliterate it. Who can this be, that feels it incumbent upon Himself to assert that God's greatness surpasses His own? Can we conceive of arrogance approaching to this, that a mere man should make the declaration? Yet the words seem natural on the lips of Jesus Christ. Whatever mystery of subordination, in the essence of the Godhead or in the economy of salvation, they may imply, they either raise Him who uttered them entirely above the level of ordinary humanity, or they stamp Him with an egotism intolerably absurd in its self-appreciation.

Such being the atmosphere of all Christ's words and works, we are no longer surprised to hear Him call men to Himself as the fount of consolation and refreshment: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden,

[1] St. John xiv. 28.

and I will give you rest."[1] "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."[2] Whether these words, which have proved themselves among the most precious of Gospel promises to weary men, would not savour of presumption akin to blasphemy, if Jesus Christ were mere man, is a question that has not always been pressed with the insistence which logical clearness demands. Here, as so often, the heart has been truer in its instinct than the head; and witness has been borne to the divine claim of Christ by some who with their lips have denied it.

The Fourth Gospel abounds in sayings which assert that Christ, in His own Person, fully meets the spiritual needs of men: "As the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father." "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever." "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." "I am the light of the

[1] St. Matt. xi. 28. [2] St. John vii. 37.

world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send Him unto you."[1]

These instances appeal with less force to many, because of the doubts that have been cast on the authenticity of this Gospel. Moreover, it is perfectly consistent with a belief in its Johannine authorship, to acknowledge that it is marked by a more deliberate literary purpose, and a clearer theological aim, than is the case with the Synoptics. The fundamental conceptions that dominate the mind of the author; the antithesis between light and darkness; between the kingdom of this world, which is the special sphere of the evil one, and that kingdom which cometh from above; between love that is life, and death that rules in the carnal heart; these undoubtedly colour the phraseology of the discourses of Jesus, as well as the comments of the Evangelist himself. But this is far from an admission that the Christ of the Fourth Gospel differs, in any material degree, from Him whom the Synoptists portray. The background of tradition, common to all four Evangelists, everywhere implies a unique claim to divine authority on the part of Jesus Christ. And, indeed, it is not necessary to go beyond the first Evangelist

[1] St. John v. 21–23; vi. 51; xi. 25, 26; viii. 12; xvi. 7.

to find passages which are as strong in their assertion of divinity as any contained in the pages of St. John. Let us take three which stand out with special prominence.

In St. Matt. xi. 27, in close connection with a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father, Jesus says: "All things are delivered unto Me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." These words distinctly affirm an exclusive knowledge of God, which does not comport with any attainment possible to mere humanity. And moreover, the function of revealing this knowledge to men belongs primarily to Him alone.

St. Matt. xxv. contains a picture of the Judgment, in which the Son of Man is represented as coming in glory with all the holy angels. As king He sits on the throne, and separates between the nations, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. The standard of judgment is determined solely by the relation of men to Himself. As they have treated Him, so are they inheritors of the Kingdom or banished among the cursed. Again we must ask—Who is this that usurps the prerogatives of God Almighty, and proclaims Himself supreme judge? Who, but God, is competent to the task of dividing eternally between the righteous and the wicked,

apportioning their award as they have been loyal or disloyal to Himself?

In St. Matt. xxviii. 19, our Lord commands the Apostles to go forth preaching, and baptizing all nations in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. These words have from time immemorial been connected with the Church's most solemn initiatory rite, and from them was elaborated the earliest doctrinal statement of her creed. We can hardly deny that the baptismal commission formed a part of the primitive tradition of Christ's teaching.[1] But it is in this formula of baptism that the self-assertion of Jesus reaches its climax. That any mere man should join his name with that of the Father, on a footing of equality, is inconceivable, unless his reason were deranged and egotism had lapsed into madness.

Plainly, the Gospels know nothing of a man Jesus, supremely good and wise in things pertaining to the spirit, but avoiding all semblance of authority save that which belongs to transcendent human righteousness. If the Fourth Gospel represents Jesus as habitually emphasising

[1] It is claimed by certain critics that the primitive mode of baptism was simply in "the Name of the Lord Jesus," and that no trace of the longer formula is found earlier than the middle of the second century, if we except this passage in St. Matthew. This is a very doubtful thesis to maintain. But as at present we are only seeking to discern clearly the picture of Jesus presented in the Gospels as we possess them, the critical question does not here affect the argument.

His eternal relationship with the Father, and puts into His mouth a clear statement of the glory which He shared with God before the foundation of the world, it is none the less true that the same divine claim is unmistakably implied in the picture of His character as drawn by the Synoptists. And this brings us face to face with a dilemma, which it is cowardice to shirk.

To assume that Jesus made no such claim, but that it was foisted upon Him by the mistaken enthusiasm of His followers, is in the highest degree uncritical. It is easy to see why this course should be taken by those who *a priori* deny the possibility of Incarnation. If Jesus Himself were guilty of so gross a blunder, His character as a spiritual guide would be seriously discredited. Meanwhile, one shrinks from robbing the world of its highest ideal of goodness. It is hard to shake off the reverend associations which enshrine the name of Jesus Christ. One would fain preserve the moral impetus of His example, which has for ages urged men on to heights of holiness. But the excellence of the sentiment, underlying this theory of later accretions, does not suffice to rehabilitate it as sound criticism. Our only source of information concerning the man Jesus Christ makes Him divine, and that in such fashion that all His words and acts are coloured by the consciousness of a

supreme spiritual authority. To try to rend apart the human and the divine, and reconstruct a hypothetical Christ which shall satisfy the requirements of a purely naturalistic philosophy, is to leave each man to follow the dictates of his own fancy. The Christ of history is replaced by a subjective notion of what the perfect man is likely to be. But, in truth, it is beyond all bounds of probability that a fact, like the divine claim of Christ, so closely and consistently interwoven with the whole texture of His character, should be due to nothing but the prejudice and the mistakes of His biographers. It is far more natural to suppose that the unvarying tradition is based on some foundation of reality.

In this case, if Christ indeed asserted that He was the Son of God, and we still refuse to allow the possibility of such a revelation of the divine, two alternatives remain. Either He was a deliberate deceiver, or else He was self-deceived. The former would probably be maintained by no one. But if He was self-deceived, in a matter of such supreme spiritual import, can we longer have implicit faith in His moral teaching? Such overweening self-confidence must prove that He was lacking in the first elements of a sane and balanced judgment. There would be, then, nothing left us but to account Him one among the many religious teachers, whose systems, amidst much that is imperfect, yet refract some

scattered rays of truth. But this conclusion is rendered impossible by another at which we have already arrived. There is that, in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which marks it off from all other religious systems—a moral perfection which stamps it with finality. Not only is this the verdict of history, but the individual conscience bears testimony to the unique influence of Jesus Christ. Indisputable facts, then, refute the hypothesis of a Christ, whose moral and spiritual judgment was so beclouded that He erroneously laid claim to divine prerogatives.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

In the records of the New Testament, and in the unbroken tradition of the Church, the divine claim of Jesus Christ stands in closest relation with His rising again from the dead. The Resurrection sets the final seal on His mission, accrediting His words and His works as the revelation of God. Plainly, we here pass beyond the possibility of appeal to the moral intuitions. If religion is to rest, in any measure, on historical facts—if revelation is to be authenticated by events that happened at a certain time and place—we are driven to apply those critical methods by which alone, in such cases, the credibility of human testimony can be established.

But straightway, the whole inquiry is complicated by a blank denial, on the part of many, that the event to be investigated could, under any circumstances, have taken place. This denial entrenches itself on scientific ground. The uniformity of nature cannot be invaded, and a miracle, therefore, is merely a contradiction in terms. It is a mistake, however, to suppose

that the objection always presents itself under a purely scientific guise. Subtle movements of thought, having little outward semblance to naturalism, make strongly in the same direction. Questions are frequently raised as to the very nature of revelation; and whether, in strictness, its province must not be confined to the activity of those moral and spiritual instincts which are universal in the heart of man. Dr. Martineau draws a distinction between what he is pleased to term apocalyptic and revealed religion, and maintains that the latter alone, which is identified with the monitions of God in the individual soul, has abiding truth. Apocalyptic religion, under which he would include the whole traditional view of the Person and work of Christ, is but the fruit of unchastened fancy and superstition.

Again, we meet with fine-spun speculations which relegate religion exclusively to the sphere of the poetic imagination. It is the realm of ideals, of what *ought* to be over against what *is*. The function of religion, according to this view, is to impart to life its values, and to this end it clothes itself, from time to time, in such forms as make appeal to the popular mind, though these forms are necessarily transient and have no intrinsic validity. Religion is distinguished from pure ethics in just this quality, that it stirs the springs of motive with a new ardour through a

pictorial presentation of the truth. But the outward dress of historical facts and formulated doctrines has nothing whatever to do with its real essence. Religion can no more be wedded to facts, save in vulgar apprehension, than the ideal can be perfectly realised without thereby ceasing to be the ideal.[1]

This masterful scorn of facts may seem, at first sight, utterly antithetic to the scientific temper. But it is so only in appearance. Behind the apparently ingenuous plea, that religion ought not to be handicapped by trivialities of time and space, lurks the desire to leave the natural world completely in the hands of science. The splendid fervour of moral enthusiasm throws a glamour over Dr. Martineau's negations. But where the moral intuitions are less keen, it is inevitable that ethical sanctions should lose something of their strength, when religion, in the common acceptation of the term, is regarded as but the dream of the human heart, seeking to invest life with adequate emotional values. In the more advanced speculations of these idealistic philosophers, theism itself would seem to rest on a rather precarious basis. In accordance with a metaphysic, which is, perhaps, more ambitious than profound, a sharp line is drawn between existence and reality. Strangely am-

[1] For an ingenious presentation of this super-subtle line of reasoning see *Poetry and Religion*, by George Santayana.

biguous results follow when one tries to work out this distinction in relation to our own self-conscious personality. The truth is that ideals, though never perfectly embodied in any act, are influential, pass from abstraction to reality, only as they find this embodiment in ever progressive measure. It is a cheap idealism which casts reproach on the actual; a web spun in the air; a clever legerdemain with words.

But even when it is granted that God's hand is to be traced in history; that all facts potentially contain a revelation; there remains often a curious unwillingness to recognise any exceptional sacredness in the history of Jesus Christ. Apparently there are cryptic reasons against believing that revelation can culminate in any special historical process; we are caught in the meshes of superstition unless we regard God's action as evenly distributed. Indeed, only in a secondary sense, and by way of accommodation, may we say that God reveals Himself. For man must possess in the resources of his own spirit all the data for the development of religion, according to fixed laws, without the intervention of any immediate divine agency. Evolution is, in these days, a powerful word to conjure with, and it is supposed by many to be the solvent of all traditional views concerning the supernatural character of the life and work of Jesus Christ.

Such an *a priori* denial of the possibility of

miracles, however it may wear the face of scientific certitude, at bottom blankly contradicts the whole principle of induction. Having adopted the inductive method, we will hold to it, and try honestly to face facts. And, as the most astonishing among the alleged facts of the Gospel history, we shall concentrate attention on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, not foreclosing argument by assertions concerning what may or may not be possible, but seeking to weigh the evidence fairly on one side and on the other. But before entering upon such an examination, it is well that we should dispose of one question — exactly what is meant by calling the Resurrection a miracle?

The word, miracle, has probably done more to introduce confusion into the discussion of Christian Evidences than any other term. It is often used loosely, without any attempt at exact definition. When defined, the correlative terms involved in the definition are, in turn, left obscure. And thus the argument that is built up on this indeterminate foundation lacks clearness, and lies exposed to every sort of critical attack. Etymologically the word means a *wonder*, and nothing more. Hence has arisen a figurative use, which helps to confuse its more definitely theological significance. We speak of a miracle of beauty or goodness, meaning thereby what arouses our admiration as

beyond the range of our own present accomplishment. There is a time-worn illustration, seriously put forward as throwing light on the nature of miracles, which in similar fashion simply blurs the outline of any distinctive meaning. The tropical savage, who for the first time saw men walking on a frozen pond, would behold, it is said, what to him were a miracle. Thus a miracle is only something which is strange to our present experience.

This general application of the word, which makes it merely synonymous with wonderful, finds place in many modern Apologetic treatises, in a form that is speciously attractive. Whether the usage is equally conducive to clearness of thought is open to question. Great stress is laid on *moral* miracles, such as the unique beauty of the character of Jesus Christ; the transformation of the Apostles after the Resurrection, and the like. We cannot object to the prominence assigned to these facts; it is quite in accord with the argument that we have ourselves been pursuing. But the use of the word, miracle, in this connection, if more than a rhetorical device, is certainly open to criticism. It would seem to imply that, in arguing thus, we are following the traditional method and resting the weight of evidence upon miracles. But this is simply to confuse counsel with words. We are, in fact, yielding to the exigencies of modern thought

and putting miracles, in the proper sense of the word, into the background; while those facts which make immediate appeal to the moral sense are given the place of pre-eminence. To maintain the old nomenclature, while abandoning what it has always signified, can serve no good purpose, and may even expose us to the charge of disingenuousness. The word, miracle, in Apologetic discussion, should be reserved for those extraordinary events in the physical world, which have always been regarded by the Church as evidence of the immediate intervention of God.

To avoid confusion we have narrowed down the word to its proper application, but this does not advance us far. It still remains to seek out the essential quality of these facts which are termed miracles, and to determine how far the inferences that have been drawn from them are justifiable. Does a miracle involve a contravention or suspension of the laws of nature? If so, its occurrence would manifestly reveal the immediate over-ruling hand of God. Before we can answer the question, however, we must define what we mean by a law of nature. Law, as applied to physical phenomena, is simply an observed sequence of events. It is the way in which things happen, discovered by observation and painstaking scientific research. It has in itself no executive power; it must not be con-

founded with the ultimate force which lies behind the law. If that force be the will of God, as every consistent theist must believe, then the discovery of a natural law is really a reading of God's thought, a coming into fuller knowledge of the divine reason. The uniformity of nature, the invariableness of natural law rests, then, not alone on the inductions of science, but upon our reverent apprehension of the eternal wisdom. Under this construction, it is hard to see how we can consistently deem a miracle the suspension of law, in any other sense than as the lifting of a hand is a suspension of the laws of gravitation.

In accordance with this general view, a suggestive analogy has been drawn between miraculous agency, and man's action as related to some lower form of intelligence. If, it is urged, we can think of the lower animals as so endowed that they apprehend an order of nature, then many human actions must appear to them violations of that order which alone they are capable of conceiving. They cannot grasp the forces at work, nor understand that combination of existing powers which is the fruit of man's volition. Man is similarly placed as regards God. "Such actions are, in fact, signs; those which are peculiar to men, of the presence of human intelligence; those of the divine Christ, of divine intelligence and power." The line of

reasoning is cogent, and undoubtedly shows that an apparent violation of natural law may be such merely to our ignorance. But it offers no hint as to how miracles are to be differentiated from other providential dealings of God. This difference can hardly consist in a more immediate presence of God; for then the question must arise—To what distance shall we push God's agency in the ordinary course of nature and providence, to save space for this more intimate intrusion of the divine? Such quantitative differences seem congruous with a deistic conception of an absent Deity, who commonly works through deputed mechanical forces, rather than with the truth of an immanent God.

Similar difficulties beset us when we assert that a miracle is a supernatural event, and, therefore, legitimate proof of the divine authority of Him who works the wonder. Before we can use the word, supernatural, intelligently, we must define nature, and to do this adequately is by no means an easy task. We may, indeed, agree to use nature as synonymous with the sphere of God's ordinary manifestation of Himself in the physical creation, and reserve the word, supernatural, for extraordinary manifestations. But this is to make the meaning of the word purely relative, with edges so blurred as to unfit it for use in any closely reasoned argument. Probably, however, not much is gained by attempting more than

this. Supernatural may be a convenient term for popular use; perhaps it is so embedded in conventional religious language that it is unwise to disavow it; but philosophically it is worthless, and it tells us nothing as to the essential characteristic of the miraculous.

In this whole discussion, it is necessary to distinguish sharply three questions that are often confused. First, are the miracles recorded in the New Testament verifiable as facts? Secondly, if verifiable, what is their evidential value? And thirdly, what is the essential nature of a miracle? It is possible for a man to differ widely from the traditional view as to the proper answer to the second and third of these questions, while still accepting implicitly the affirmative answer to the first. Our main endeavour should be directed to the establishment of the miracles as facts. They will then have evidential value as corroborative testimony, even though inconclusive if standing alone. And the more abstruse speculations, concerning their exact relation to other physical phenomena, may be safely left to the adjustment of an age which shall have advanced to a more perfect synthesis of knowledge than the present can boast.

When we turn from the confusion incident to the modern use of the word, miracle, to the pages of the New Testament, we are met by language that lays a totally different accent on the whole

subject. This is not the only instance in which religious thought has suffered detriment in the transition from Greek to Latin. Three words are used in the New Testament for these facts which we are wont to class under the single term, miracle; and the relative frequency with which each is used is worthy of careful consideration.[1] The word that occurs oftenest is *σημεῖον*, a *sign*. The emphasis here is plainly on the fact that these events are instinct with a message concerning God, that they are pregnant with deep religious significance. Next in frequency stands *δύναμις*, still a "sign," though in more restricted sense; the events bear testimony to the mighty working of divine *power*. And *τέρας*, the exact equivalent of our "miracle," is used far less often, and never alone; it is always coupled with some other word, as in the phrase "signs and wonders."[2]

It will hardly be denied that a distinct loss has been entailed through our exclusive use of the word, wonder, to cover the whole ground. The larger religious significance of the miracu-

[1] See Trench on *The Miracles of our Lord*. Preliminary Essay.

[2] It is sometimes difficult to determine whether the reference is to what we should properly term miracles. This is especially true with regard to the language of the Apocalypse. But the following numbers will give an approximately accurate idea of the relative frequency with which the words are used in the New Testament as applied to miracles: *σημεῖον*, 61; *δύναμις*, 28; *τέρας*, 16 times.

lous history has been thereby seriously obscured. No one of the New Testament terms requires that we should read into it all the metaphysical implications which have been supposed to weight the doctrine of miracles. The facts are recorded as revelations of various aspects of God's character, just as the words of Jesus Christ constitute such a revelation. They are evidences of God's power. They arrest attention because they are wonderful. But these are characteristics of many other works of God. To erect an impassable barrier between miracles and all other phenomena is an arbitrary procedure, which finds no warrant in Scripture.

It is self-evident that events of this class will have far more weight with eye-witnesses than can be looked for in the case of later generations. Their impressiveness now is lessened, because the testimony that substantiates them must needs be subjected to a complicated critical examination. The vividness of sense-perception is replaced by the dry conclusions of logic. But even for eye-witnesses, it is difficult to see how they could possess the evidential value which has sometimes been imputed to them. Of course, this value will always vary, according to the degree of culture of the beholder; according to his mode of apprehending the relation of God to the world. But if these mighty works were done before our eyes to-day, while they would doubtless startle us into

attention and be valuable as corroborative evidence, while we might learn something more of God through the ethical lessons conveyed, as it were by parable, the miracles in and of themselves would not amount to an Apologetic demonstration. The man who antecedently saw God in nature would see Him in these wonders. From the point of view of naturalism, the one impulse would be to explain them without recourse to the hypothesis of any divine working.

The miracles of the New Testament lack for us the confirmation of immediate experience; but they possess another kind of confirmation which is, in many ways, more impressive. In the narrative of the Evangelists they stand in most intimate connection with the character and words of Jesus Christ. That character, beautiful with all the graces of transcendent righteousness, finds reflection in the miracles, and they make their appeal to our hearts because they are *His* works. The miracles are again and again the occasion prompting to words more replete with heavenly wisdom than any others that have ever fallen from man's lips; we cannot divide between the two. The inspiration of the teaching strikes back upon the deeds. Together they form a unity which defies all critical attempts at severance. How cold and irrational seems a purely abstract discussion of acts which come to us thus instinct with personal power and persuasiveness!

The relative position of importance that we have assigned to miracles is certainly not inconsistent with the attitude of Jesus Christ Himself. When a certain nobleman besought Him to heal his son, He said, "Unless ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." He distinctly deprecated the demand for a sign from heaven, without which the scribes and Pharisees refused to accept His Messianic mission. It has been objected that, as many of His miracles had been performed publicly, the reference here must be to some startling glory manifested in the skies, such as the cruder Jewish imagination associated with the coming of the Messiah. But the inference that Jesus Christ did not rest the burden of proof, as to His authority, on miraculous attestation still remains unassailable. This conclusion is not dependent upon special texts. The whole tenor of His recorded words bears unmistakable witness to the fact. He says, indeed, "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works' sake."[1] Appeal is here made to His works; but, even so, only a secondary place is conceded to them as compared with the self-evidencing power of His Person. Nor have we the right to consider that the reference is exclusively to what are commonly called miracles. For His own definition of His works we have but to turn to the message sent to St. John Baptist in reply to

[1] St. John xiv. 11.

his inquiry concerning the Messiah. And there we find that they include preaching good news to the poor as on a par with raising the dead.[1]

But an Apologetic that lingers too long over the general subject of miracles, without bringing the whole question to a focus by concentrating the argument on the Resurrection, beats the air in vain. If Christ, indeed, rose again, this renders the account of *all* His wonderful works probable. Instead of its being hard to believe that He performed them, it were harder to believe the reverse. And may we not dissipate scruples by insisting that the point at issue is simply this—is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ a *fact?* Too often another question—are miracles possible?—engrosses attention, until the mists of vague generalisation completely veil the true centre of interest. The possibility of miracles depends upon what we mean by the word itself. It is quite conceivable that it should be so defined as to render a negative answer a foregone conclusion. But it is a strange ineptitude thus to play hide-and-seek with the most momentous spiritual crisis of history. Call the Resurrection by any name you choose, all that vitally concerns us is to know whether, as a matter of fact, Jesus Christ rose again. Granted that, if the Resurrection be established historically, this would not *prove* Jesus Christ divine; still, it is plain that, taken in conjunction with His explicit

[1] Cf. Matt. xi. 5.

claim to divine authority, it would raise such an overwhelming probability in favour of the Gospel that all rational objections to the venture of faith would be removed.

Historic facts are never coercive in the religious sphere. The Resurrection holds a place of prime importance among historic evidences. But the function of all outward facts, in the development of faith, may be easily exaggerated. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." We may hope that the history of belief will normally follow some such course as that sketched in the preceding argument. The heart being won by Christ's beauty, a man will be led to study more closely His recorded life. The attention will then be arrested by the unparalleled audacity of His claims, which yet strangely harmonise with all the gentlest and most winning traits of His character. This ethical mystery demands explanation; the simplest explanation is that the claims are justifiable. If, further, the story of the Resurrection appear also inexplicable, fairly considering the weight of evidence, unless the historic fact underlying it be acknowledged, this may well prompt to an abandonment of faith, which will bring with it the highest spiritual assurance. But while the Resurrection stands isolated, a subject of critical examination, without moral or spiritual affilia-

tions in the mind of the investigator, it has little to do with the genesis of a living faith, however the scales of intellectual probability may incline. Bearing this in mind, we turn to the records of the fact contained in the New Testament.

The statements of the Synoptists are straightforward and plain, though not as circumstantial as we are tempted to desire. St. Matthew tells us briefly of an appearance to "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary," as they were returning from the sepulchre on the first day of the week in the early dawn. "And behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him. Then saith Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell My brethren, that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me." We then read of the return of the eleven into Galilee, where Jesus appeared to them, and gave them their commission to teach and to baptize.[1] In St. Mark, if we omit the last twelve verses, which for textual reasons are considered by some to form no part of the original Gospel, we have only the record of the appearance of an angel in the empty tomb, who announces to the women that Jesus is risen, and will precede His disciples on their journey into Galilee, where they shall behold Him.[2] St. Luke tells us of the empty sepulchre found by the women. We then have the account of Jesus meeting with the two

[1] St. Matt. xxviii. [2] St. Mark xvi. 1–8.

disciples on the way to Emmaus. Jesus also appears to the eleven in Jerusalem, proves that He is no mere apparition, as in their fright they had at first supposed, and opens to their understanding the mystery of His Passion.[1]

In St. John we have the most vivid and circumstantial narrative[2]—the appearance to Mary Magdalene; the empty tomb visited by St. Peter and St. John; the interview with the disciples on the same night; the appearance again, after eight days, to the disciples, when Thomas also, who had doubted of their report, was present. And in the twenty-first chapter, which bears internal evidence of resting on the same authoritative tradition, we have the appearance of Jesus to the disciples in Galilee by the Sea of Tiberias.

Great importance has been attached by hostile critics to the differences in the several accounts. Not least, among these seeming discrepancies, is the transference of the chief appearances of the risen Christ to Galilee, in the First and Second Gospels; while St. Luke and St. John lay emphasis on His appearance in Jerusalem. It is hard, no doubt, to harmonise these apparent difficulties. But the underlying assumption in such criticism is what now concerns us. It pro-

[1] St. Luke xxiv.

[2] For an interesting argument for the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel, based on its account of the Resurrection, see Salmon's *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 267 (5th edition).

ceeds on the supposition that we may look for just such an account of these events as would now be drawn up to meet modern critical objections. This is, in the highest degree, unreasonable. In order to anticipate the exact literary methods of later scholarship, the Evangelists must needs have been veritably turned into *automata* for registering facts, in a manner quite inconsistent with their historical environment. Had this actually happened, we should now have these same critics adducing the fact as positive proof that the records could not be authentic. So, in either case, it is impossible that they should be satisfied.

It is plain that in the Synoptic Gospels we have exceedingly brief records of a widely-diffused tradition, containing only one or two salient points of the story. The accounts are not written with any reference to the sceptical animadversions of later days. The Church was founded on the fact of the Resurrection; every Christian believed it implicitly; many were probably living, at the time the Gospels took their present shape, who claimed to have seen and talked with the risen Christ. Under these circumstances there was no possibility of such a record being deemed necessary as that which modern criticism demands. If we are to have any testimony, it would seem unavoidable that it should be substantially of such a character as that which we now possess. Meanwhile, there

is manifestly a naïveté and directness about the story, as told in the Gospels, which leaves the impression of unquestionable good faith.

But if we confess that the Synoptic Gospels embody only a general tradition—and if it be probable that the only one for which direct Apostolic authority is even claimed, has undergone important modifications before arriving at the form in which we now have it—does not this militate seriously against the authority of the record? Certainly it seems not unreasonable to demand the direct testimony of an eye-witness in so all-important a matter. If we acknowledge the Fourth Gospel as St. John's, we have such testimony. And it is because of the wide-reaching result of such acknowledgment, weighting the argument against the Resurrection with a burden too heavy to be borne, that so fierce a battle has been waged over this Gospel's authenticity. But, however firmly we ourselves may be convinced of its Johannine authorship, we are not driven to appeal to the Fourth Gospel in order to obtain what amounts to first-hand evidence, and is confessed as such by all.

In 1 Corinthians xv. 3–8 we have St. Paul's account of the appearances of the Risen Jesus; and the document containing this evidence is of unquestioned authenticity. St. Paul believed that he himself had seen Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus; and his conversion opens up

interesting questions as to the power of faith in the risen Christ. But it is as a witness to the primitive tradition that he is here adduced. He was converted within six years of the Crucifixion, and had personal intercourse with those who claimed to have seen Jesus Christ immediately after His Resurrection. As a Pharisee in Jerusalem he had been bitterly hostile to the disciples of Jesus, and must have heard all that could be urged against the credibility of the Christian claim. Through him, therefore, in the passage above cited, we have what is practically the first-hand testimony of the Apostles themselves, which has also run the gauntlet of St. Paul's own criticism, and has been accepted by him as consistent and in all respects trustworthy. The fact that it is difficult, in some minor points, to make the account given by St. Paul fit perfectly into the story as recounted in the Gospels, is of slight moment compared with the unquestioning allegiance of St. Paul himself to the substance of the Apostolic tradition. Indeed, the conspicuous absence of solicitude, in the matter of perfectly harmonising minor details, is indirect evidence of the complete assurance which possessed the mind of the early Church, that no objections could validly be urged against the fact of the Resurrection itself.

It is needful again to remind ourselves that the rationalistic approach to this whole question

in no sense bears the character of an unbiassed historical inquiry. The point of departure is always the dogmatic assumption, implied if not expressed, that the Resurrection cannot be a fact. That being so, it becomes a necessity so to manipulate the evidence as to discover some plausible explanation of a belief as widespread as it is erroneous. If it were simply a question of literary evidence, St. Paul's testimony would lay the ghost of scepticism for ever. But if we know, beyond a peradventure, that Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, then it is incumbent on us to explain how it happens that the Resurrection was firmly believed in by His immediate disciples.

The theory of conscious fraud has been practically abandoned. The whole tone of the Gospels, the spirit and temper of the primitive Church, are completely destructive of any such hypothesis. And with this theory, the conjecture that Jesus was not dead when taken from the Cross, and that He revived under the influence of the rock-hewn tomb and aromatic spices, is also discredited; for, in effect, this really involves the theory of fraud. A Christ issuing worn and bruised from the sepulchre, and helped to some place of concealment where He passed the rest of His days on earth broken and ineffectual, necessitates the supposition that some of His friends, at least, were privy to the real facts,

yet encouraged the belief that He had miraculously risen. That a critic of Mr. Huxley's ability should have clung still to this explanation inevitably suggests that plausible theories from the rationalistic point of view are not easy to find.

The mythical theory is rendered untenable by that critical study of the records, which has clearly shown that they are too early to allow of the time necessary for the development of a myth, elaborated with such fulness and consistency. The words of Harnack represent the attitude of present-day scholarship on this point: "Sixty years ago David Friedrich Strauss thought that he had almost destroyed the historic credibility not only of the fourth but also of the first three Gospels as well. The historical criticism of two generations has succeeded in restoring that credibility in its main outlines." And, again, the same writer says: "Strauss' contention that the Gospels contain a very great deal that is mythical has not been borne out, even if the very indefinite and defective conception of what 'mythical' means in Strauss' application of the word, be allowed to pass."[1]

It would seem, then, that we are driven to some form of that theory of hallucination which has received its most elaborate treatment at

[1] Harnack's *What is Christianity?* Eng. trans. pp. 20 and 23.

the hands of M. Renan. The great French critic has worked it out in detail; and we could wish that others, who appear to be in substantial agreement with him, had more frequently followed his example in this regard. It is easy to enwrap the whole subject in glowing rhetoric; to invent hypothetical conversations between the Apostles, showing how simply the transition is made between the dawning hope that "Jesus still lives," and the distinct affirmation, "We have seen Him." And too many rest content with this. No one will accuse M. Renan of neglecting the resources of rhetoric; but he, at least, tries to give, along with the romantic setting, a clear analysis of the separate steps by which the Christian legend grew. And it is in just this detailed application of the theory that its complete inadequacy becomes apparent.[1]

Stripped of all disguise, it amounts to this. The real inventor of the Resurrection was St. Mary Magdalene. The hysterical impressionability of an overwrought woman, visiting the sepulchre, accounts for the first appearance of the risen Christ. "That grand cry from her woman's heart, 'He is risen,'" M. Renan exclaims, "has become the mainspring of faith to mankind. Hence, feeble Reason! Test not by

[1] *The Apostles*, chap. i. *passim*. For a specially striking instance of this inadequacy see Renan's explanation of the appearance of Our Lord to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus.

cold analysis this masterpiece of ideality and love!" Whether we can join in the critic's ecstatic eulogy, will depend upon our taste, and the respect which we have for that reason which is so summarily adjured to depart. This vision of St. Mary, due to disordered nerves, so we are asked to believe, worked upon the imagination of the whole band of disciples until they too became hysterical and took to seeing visions. Moreover, they saw them in conjunction, when assembled together; and held conversations with the visionary figure; and thought that it responded in audible words.

One wishes to treat this theory, so seriously propounded, with due respect. But it is hard to put it into plain words without seeming to cast ridicule upon it. There have been many hallucinations in the chequered course of human history. Man is prone to be deceived; he cannot always draw the line clearly between physical phenomena and mere subjective impressions. But was there ever an hallucination like this, which not only affected those who in all other respects have proved themselves true leaders of men, but which continued its hold, repeated itself many times, was the medium of long-continued and rational discourse, and has moreover been the turning-point in the moral and spiritual history of the world? We cannot, in reason, judge of this event as though it stood

by itself; its consequences must be reckoned with, for effects demand an adequate cause.

Among these effects requiring explanation, there is, first of all, the revolutionary change which passed upon the character of the disciples. It is plain that before the Resurrection their views of the Messianic kingdom were still largely coloured by the prevalent Jewish conceptions. Though they had enjoyed long and loving intimacy with Jesus, their hopes still clung to a carnal restoration. But after their intercourse with the risen Christ, they go forth heralding a spiritual kingdom, perfectly reflecting the spirit of that Master whom before they had persistently misunderstood. At the Crucifixion, "they all forsook Him and fled"; but now they are inspired with unflagging zeal and hope, and go forward to meet death itself with unwavering courage. A complete reconstruction has been accomplished in their moral and spiritual apprehensions.

Moreover, what was the evangel which converted the world? In the accounts that have come down to us, in the Book of the Acts, of the first Apostolic preaching, it is the one fact of the Resurrection upon which almost exclusive emphasis is laid. The Gospel heralded by St. Paul centres in the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Epistles, written with polemic purpose, and to churches in which his enemies denied his Apostolic authority, he never defends his Christo-

logy, though it involves the highest divine claims on behalf of Christ, and everywhere assumes the fact of His Resurrection. This was, evidently, ground on which St. Paul felt assured that there could be no difference of opinion, and that therefore it needed no defence. So central was the Resurrection in his belief that he exclaims, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."[1]

Either, then—in view of what the Church has been as an agent in civilisation and a promoter of all that is noblest in life—the mightiest power for good in the world has rested on a delusion, or the Resurrection is a fact. It will not serve to say that the moral teaching of Christ has alone been the vital factor in the Church's influence. As a matter of fact, that influence has resulted from the proclamation of the risen Christ. It is an arbitrary hypothesis to assume that the ethics of Christ alone could have accomplished the same work. Lofty ethics antedated the Gospel, but they did not regenerate the world. St. Paul held that the law of righteousness in itself, without a divine power enabling man to fulfil the commandment, is "the letter that killeth." And if, in seeking to account for the unparalleled influence of the Gospel, we find ourselves forced to look beyond the moral teaching of Jesus Christ, and to lay

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 14.

stress on the revelation of God's Fatherhood, and the vivid reality thus imported into spiritual relations, we cannot do this without being brought face to face with a Christ who claimed divine prerogatives, and for whom it was natural that He should rise again from the dead.

Why, then, should reason longer rebel against accepting the fact as chronicled? We dare not affirm that it cannot be. For "who is there, up to the present, that has set sure bounds to the province of the possible and the actual?" It is hard to see how, under the circumstances, we could have stronger testimony. All things have eventuated as though the Resurrection occurred; all has followed that could have been expected to result from so stupendous a fact. If true, it justifies what, on other grounds, we are forced to believe concerning the unique beauty and power of the personality of Jesus Christ. Would it not, then, seem more rational to accept the fact than to reject it?

## CHAPTER VII

### THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE CHRISTIAN RECORDS

It may have seemed illogical to postpone until now any detailed discussion of the historical trustworthiness of the New Testament records. But the sequence of the argument has a logic of its own, which at least is deliberate and not adopted through inadvertence. The literary character of the documents serving as our source of information is important; but the quality of the information conveyed determines the question, whether it is of immediate necessity to investigate the source before examining the content of the message.

Christianity is not primarily a religion of historic reminiscence, though the perversity of the human heart is prone thus to misconceive it. If the exclusive charter of the Faith lay in a distant past, and salvation consisted in believing that certain events happened centuries ago, then we could not well postpone for a moment strict inquiry as to the exact state of the evidence for those historic facts upon which all belief must

rest. The evidence under these circumstances would necessarily be for the most part external, and of a purely formal character; the whole issue would depend, in the last analysis, upon the results of a minute and thorough-going literary criticism. And this criticism, if confirmatory, would be the very foundation-stone of Christian Apology.

But the Gospel of Jesus Christ is primarily a *life*. To be saved is not to believe that something happened long ago, but to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent; it is to live the life of perfect love in fellowship with Jesus Christ. The Gospel thus invites to manifold tests other than those which lie within the province of a strictly scientific or literary criticism. The message that Jesus Christ delivered may be put to the proof of practical experience, even before the question is raised as to the exact historical conditions under which that message was first uttered.

The widespread declension of popular Christianity from the heights of spiritual accomplishment to the easier levels, where words are taken in lieu of deeds, has much to do with the factitious prominence which is often given to the whole subject of New Testament criticism. It were foolish to deny that all questions which concern the primitive records of Christianity are of most real importance; nothing is to be gained by

belittling their significance. But it is a pitiable commentary on the feeble tenure whereby Christians hold to their faith, that allegiance to Jesus Christ should be determined by any decision as to the date and authorship of an ancient manuscript. The balance of relative importance, as between the outer and the inner fact, needs often to be redressed. We must not allow, even by implication, that the first appeal of the Gospel is to the intellect. And this we certainly do, when we suffer Biblical criticism to be pushed to the front in the Christian controversy with unbelief. The heart craves proof as well as the head; its demands are imperative in the religious sphere. It is of more immediate practical importance that they should be answered, than that intellectual curiosity should be gratified. Conscience and the spirit have their own tests of truth; and the witness which they bear is as worthy of confidence as are the clearest deductions of the understanding. The latter have their due place; to ignore them wilfully is fatal to the highest interests of faith itself: but in religion they are subsidiary, and if we give them precedence, we run the risk of arriving at fallacious conclusions.

We touched indirectly, in the last chapter, on the authenticity of the documents that record the fact of Christ's Resurrection. It remains for us to dwell somewhat more at length upon the

methods and results of that higher criticism of the New Testament, which is often regarded as the most impregnable stronghold of modern unbelief. The aim and scope of this volume forbid that the subject should be treated in minute detail and with thoroughness. A great department of scholarship cannot be summarised in a few pages, nor can the present writer lay claim to the technical learning required for an adequate treatment of the theme. But a brief survey of that part of the field which more immediately concerns Apologetics, is possible; and there are certain general considerations, sometimes overlooked, which will bear restatement.

There is, however, one question which arises prior to any examination of the critical argument. May it not be that, in the interests of Apologetics, we are called on to deny the fundamental assumptions of the so-called higher criticism? A doctrine of inspiration has been widely current in the Church, which claims that Scripture was immediately dictated by God, and is therefore infallible in its letter as well as in its spirit. If such be the true position of the believer it forecloses discussion. Literary investigation, save for purely textual purposes, is an impertinence, not to say an act of sacrilege. It would be interesting to follow up this theory of inspiration, trace its genesis and the history

of its growth, seek out its alleged grounds in Scripture itself and in the doctrinal decisions of the Church. But this would lead us too far from the theme which we have in hand. One thing, however, is clear;—if this view of inspiration be deemed essential to Christianity, the effect on Apologetics would be such as to necessitate a total reconstruction of our line of reasoning. It would mean, not simply a certain attitude toward Biblical criticism, but that the whole stress of the Apologetic argument must be placed on defending this one point of the Bible's infallibility. That proved, the rest would follow; an infallible oracle is sufficient guarantee for its own utterances. But this thesis concerning inspiration is not susceptible of inductive proof; it is difficult to see how it can be based on other than purely *a priori* grounds. And as induction alone is the avenue of approach to the average mind to-day, Apology would be rendered practically impossible. There were nothing left for the Christian but to intrench himself in a determined dogmatism, and let the world pass on its way, with no attempt on his part to convince or convert.

If there is to be such a thing, then, as Apology, at least along the lines which we have adopted, there is no alternative; we must, for the purposes of our argument, ignore the doctrine of verbal inspiration. There is, of course, another

doctrine of inspiration, profoundly spiritual and, as we believe, equally orthodox, which is consistent with a frank recognition of the claims of criticism. But, if we once grant the right of any critical inquiry whatsoever, it is impossible to draw a hard and fast line, and say—thus far and no farther. When we yield the principle we must allow its freest application. The only qualifying condition which may be imposed is the demand for sympathetic recognition of the moral and spiritual quality of the literature to be investigated. And it would seem wiser not to permit the word, inspiration, to obtrude itself into the discussion. It is enough for our purpose, if we can establish on critical grounds that the New Testament is, in the main, a trustworthy record of the facts of the Gospel history.

We have said that one qualification in the critic may justly be insisted on, namely, that he shall acknowledge the Bible as possessing pre-eminent religious value. Undoubtedly this runs counter to a commonly accepted principle. It is assumed, without question, that fairness in criticism is dependent upon complete absence of bias in the mind of the critic. But to ask for such initial neutrality is, in the first place, to make an impossible demand. No one can hold his judgment in perfect equilibrium, in dealing with a book so intimately connected

with all the deepest hopes and fears of mankind. The claim frequently put forward, that the rationalistic critic is at an advantage in this regard, rests upon a curiously unstable foundation. As a matter of fact, it would be hard to find, in the whole range of scholarly enterprise, a more fixed prepossession than that which governs in the mind of just this class of Biblical critics. Here is a literature which purports to contain the record of a unique revelation of God; yet the rationalist has already made up his mind that, in no essential respect, does it differ from any other literature. Biblical history is full of marvellous events, which are recorded as signs of God's providential care for His people; the critic starts from the premise that, in no case, can a miracle be authentic. These are not propositions which he seeks to prove, they constitute the canons according to which he judges the literature. It is plain, then, that he will have every interest in discrediting the historical character of the narrative, where this is possible. He will bring the date of composition down to the latest point consistent with probability — nay, later still, if he be pressed by the exigencies of his theory. There will be a temptation to emphasise discrepancies, in order to cast doubt on authorship, in a way totally different from that in which the same

facts would be treated in the work of a secular historian. Moreover, tradition may come to exercise an influence strictly analogous to that which is deprecated in the case of ecclesiastical predilections. Great names connected with some ingenious critical theory, like the "tendency" hypothesis of Baur, become the rallying point of schools of thought, until it is considered akin to disloyalty to pass a judgment which contravenes the dominant mode of interpretation. Similar dangers threaten the believing critic from the other side. But to regard him as at a disadvantage when compared with his opponent, and, in the purely critical field, to give all the honours of fearless integrity to the latter, is to run in the face of facts.

We may go farther. If we are convinced of the reality which lies behind our religious experience; if there be truth in the contention that God has revealed Himself in history, and that the Bible is the storehouse of that revelation; then, plainly, a certain religious aptitude is needful if the critic is to be really competent for his task. The man who has no ear for the music of verse, who confounds the insight of the poetic imagination with the play of fancy, and counts its sway over the heart among the foibles and weaknesses of humanity, is not the critic whose judgment, in this particular department of literature, would commend itself

as trustworthy. Nor should we set the task of determining the specific value of some rare work of art, to one who was lacking in æsthetic appreciation and ignorant of the laws of artistic expression. Why, then, may we not demand that the Biblical critic shall be, at the same time, a moral and religious expert, if his conclusions are to bring home conviction? The tyro in these weightier matters, whose only equipment is linguistic or archæological learning, may often make a happy guess; he may dissipate illusions and correct mistakes, within the limits of his special line of scholarship; but he will hardly speak the last word concerning that book which chronicles the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

The question as to the trustworthiness of Christian records naturally falls under the two heads of external and internal evidence. The former is of such a kind, that a certain amount of technical training is necessary, before the argument can be fully appreciated. But there are general principles and broad results which all can understand. And in the matter of internal evidence, even wider scope is given for judgments of common sense, which the plainest man is competent to pass. There has been a wonderful advance since the days of Strauss' thoroughly uncritical assumptions and Baur's brilliant and specious *a priori* reasoning. Honest and patient

investigation of facts has characterised more recent critical research; and, on the whole, the conclusions of scholars have tended more and more to coincide with the traditional view as to the date and authorship of the New Testament writings. It is true, that the phenomena presented by the Synoptic Gospels are so complex that the theories concerning the exact mode of their compilation, and their mutual interdependence, are legion. But out of this confusing mass of hypotheses, there emerges a distinct tendency toward admitting that their character is substantially that of contemporary documents. Harnack says, "that the tradition here presented to us is, in the main, at first hand is obvious." And so cautious a critic as Sanday concludes, that "the great mass of the narrative in the first three Gospels took its shape before the destruction of Jerusalem, *i.e.* within less than forty years of the events."

As far as purely external evidence is concerned, it is frequently contended that the Four Gospels are better attested than the chief works of classical literature; and it has been urged that this ought to be sufficient. But while this inference is a fair one, if we have regard only to the cogency of the evidence in the eyes of Christians, it can easily be pressed too far. If such serious consequences flowed from the acceptance of some Greek or Latin classic, as from

the acknowledgment of the Gospels, we should doubtless have equally extravagant demands for proof of its authenticity. The story of wonders occurring in Homer or Ovid, is of no concern to present-day life. Call it the mere riot of fancy, regard it as myth, or legend, or deliberate fraud, it matters not. But the miracles of the Gospel cannot be thus dismissed. They are recorded soberly as facts; they are closely connected with the beginnings of that religion which has dominated the world; hence, it is inevitable that the question, whether the record be early or late, should become of momentous import. Every critical device will be called into play, on the one hand to invalidate a literature involving such wide-reaching religious consequences, and on the other to establish its authenticity.

In one way, the very fact that the New Testament literature has always held a place of peculiar sacredness and authority in the Church, helps us in the construction of the evidential argument. Conservative forces have thus been arrayed against the corruption of the tradition, or the sudden introduction of novel material. The bearing of this fact will become more apparent when we consider the earliest testimony to the Four Gospels, which is universally acknowledged as above all question.

In the last quarter of the second century, we

have passed beyond the region where conflicting opinions of critics can make us doubtful of the weight of the evidence adduced. The testimony of Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian proves clearly that, at this time, our Four Gospels were acknowledged by the Church, throughout the world, not only as authentic but as possessed of supreme authority.[1] They were read in the public services along with the Old Testament, and there are unmistakable signs that they were regarded with profound veneration, as being the utterance, not merely of men, but of the Holy Ghost. Whether these Fathers of the Church are completely trustworthy guides, either in their exegesis of Scripture or their special views of inspiration, does not concern our present inquiry. It is beside the mark, for instance, to cast ridicule on the reasons given by Irenæus for the fact that there are four Gospels and no more. The point which we would now emphasise is this—books which had acquired so widespread a sanctity could not have been of yesterday. The testimony of these writers carries us back beyond the date of their own explicit statements. Time is required, that books may win a place of unquestioned acceptance in a religious society scattered over the world. Were there no earlier

[1] The argument in the text is largely indebted to Salmon's *Introduction to the New Testament.* Comp. also B. Weiss, *Manual of Introduction to the New Testament.*

references to the Four Gospels, we should be forced to conjecture that they had been in circulation for at least a generation, before appeal could be made to them, in widely separated branches of the Church, as the absolute standard of Christian teaching. But we are not obliged thus to rely on conjecture.

Comparatively recent discoveries have proved that Tatian's *Diatessaron* was a harmony of the Four Gospels which we now possess.[1] Tatian was himself a pupil of Justin Martyr; and if we may infer the master's acceptance of the Gospels from that of the disciple, we are carried back to the middle of the second century. It is true, that Justin's own references are to memoirs of the Apostles, and not explicitly to the Gospels by name. But as these references occur in Apologetic writings addressed to heathen, who did not accept the authority of the Sacred Books, it is not unnatural that they should be general, and that exact quotations should be infrequent. Meanwhile, it is certainly a violent supposition, that Justin Martyr having in hand certain traditions concerning Jesus Christ, which had been put into literary form, his disciple should have ignored these writings and should have received, without question, four versions of our Lord's life, which had been subsequently foisted on the Church. Many critics hold, independently of

[1] Comp. *The Gospel and its Witnesses*, by H. Wace, pp. 16 *ff.*

these considerations, that Justin Martyr gives direct evidence of having used our Synoptic Gospels, and that his thought is largely coloured by the special teaching of the Gospel of St. John.

Until the discovery of the apocryphal Gospel of St. Peter, an heretical work probably used by Justin, and dated by most critics in the first quarter of the second century, it was supposed that no earlier external testimony to the Four Gospels, except the well-known reference of Papias, was extant. But the writer of the Gospel of St. Peter appears to have used our Gospels.[1] At least, he gives evidence of having been influenced by the separate lines of tradition which they embody; and as these represent circles of thought in widely severed portions of the Church, it is most natural to conclude that he had our Gospels before him.

The reference of Papias to the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark has been the source of very various theories. It is not necessary for us to enter upon the vexed questions arising from the ambiguity of his words. But it is certainly very precarious to argue *ex silentio* against the existence of the Third and Fourth Gospels at this time.

The fact, that we have such scant literary remains of the age immediately succeeding that

[1] Comp. Sanday's *Bampton Lectures on Inspiration*, pp. 310 *ff.*

of the Apostles, is sufficient explanation why no more abundant early testimony is available. Granted that the thread of external testimony is slight, we must ever bear in mind that the vital question for Apologetics is this,—*Can* the Gospels be accepted as trustworthy?—not, as is often assumed,—*Must* they be so accepted? If there were no inner cogency in these writings, making direct appeal to the heart, then, let it be acknowledged, the external testimony might possibly seem too weak to bear the weight resting upon it. But since they contain an evangel which has transformed the world, it is enough if the external evidence be favourable so far as it goes, and does not contradict the claims put forward by the writings themselves. It is not as though the appeal of Scripture were recognised exclusively by Christians; it must be felt in greater or less degree by all men of ingenuous mind. These writings are unique in spiritual beauty and power. The burden of proof may justly be laid, then, on those who deny their authority. And the contention that the Gospels, in their present form, were unknown in the Church far into the second century, has still to be substantiated.

What has been said above in regard to the Gospels may be taken to apply, in large measure, both to the Synoptists and to St. John. But the Fourth Gospel stands, in many ways, on a plane

by itself, and demands separate consideration. The character of the book is such that more serious consequences to the rationalistic position flow from its acceptance. And, moreover, here it is possible to rely on internal evidence to a greater extent than is the case with the other Gospels. For it is plainly the work of one author; it bears no mark of embodying a general tradition, but, on the other hand, it is stamped in every detail with the impress of a striking individuality. It professes to be the account of an eye-witness; and although the writer is not named, no one can doubt that the book clearly implies that he is the Apostle John. This claim to Apostolic authorship is of first importance, for it makes one of two hypotheses necessary. Either St. John did, indeed, write the Gospel, or else it is a deliberate forgery, intended to deceive the Church. This is not too harsh a statement of alternatives, nor does it argue a faulty historic perspective. Doubtless the idea of what constitutes literary honesty has undergone great modifications. What would be dishonest to-day was deemed justifiable in former times. But here it is not a question of using the great names of an earlier generation, which contemporaries could not mistake, to add dignity to an argument by giving it an impressive historical setting. Nor is it an instance, like the case of ancient prophets, where the burden

of the message swallowed up all thought of authorship. If St. John be not the author, every cleverest shift is resorted to in order to give the impression that he was. Not once is he directly named, but the subtlest touches constantly imply his identity with the writer. Indeed, on this hypothesis, the ingenuity displayed sometimes almost passes credence. For instance, in this Gospel alone, the Baptist is mentioned invariably as John, with no distinguishing title; in one man's mind, at least, there could be no thought of any confusion thus arising. We seem forced, then, either to regard it as the writing of the Apostle, or to reject it utterly as unworthy of a place in the New Testament; for if it be not St. John's, while professing to set forth Him who is the Truth, its fundamental motive is indistinguishable from sheer dishonesty.

No one denies that this Gospel contains vivid details of description, which are most easily explained as springing from the memory of an eye-witness. Little notes of time are given—the exact hour when certain events occurred. Or again, we find slight incidents recorded, which reflect a bit of local colour, but are not immediately related to the general theme. The account of the Passion and the Resurrection is full of the marks of verisimilitude. And yet, notwithstanding this, the writer is often spoken of as though his work were, in the main, a

kind of mystical rhapsody, the outcome of late Hellenistic speculation. Nothing could be further from the truth. It has been convincingly shown that, although the Gospel is written in the interests of an advanced Christology, its tone is emphatically Hebraic and not Greek.[1] And with all its animadversions on the unbelieving Jews, the author not only displays thorough familiarity with Palestine, but also, on more than one occasion, the deepest sympathy with the privileges and prerogatives of the Chosen People. Moreover, the doctrine concerning the Person of Christ, contained in this Gospel, furnishes no proof of a late date; for all its loftiest conceptions find parallel in St. Paul's Epistles.[2] And the anti-Jewish bias of the author is no more pronounced than that which characterised the Apostle who had been brought up a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

It cannot be denied that grave difficulties present themselves, when we attempt to harmonise perfectly, not only minor details but even the more general outlines of our Lord's life, in the Synoptists and the Fourth Gospel. In St. John,

[1] See the chap. entitled "The Fourth Gospel," in Hutton's *Theological Essays*.

[2] For a catena of references see note on p. 202 of Salmon's *Introduction* (5th edition). One of the strongest objections brought against the Johannine authorship of the Gospel, that relating to the quarto-deciman controversy, is ably dealt with by both Salmon and Hutton, in the works above referred to.

the public ministry of Jesus is represented as centred in Jerusalem; while in the Synoptists, Galilee appears to be the principal scene of His activity. The length of the ministry would seem, at first sight, to be much shorter in the Synoptists than in the Fourth Gospel. We have already pointed out the apparent divergence as to the scene of the chief Resurrection appearances. But the Synoptists undoubtedly represent the substance of a long-established oral tradition which first shaped itself for purposes of evangelisation. They thus bear the stamp of the practical propaganda from which they sprang. This would account, in large measure, for their distinctive features, especially if the oral tradition originated in Galilee. And, in any event, the differences pointed out are not sufficient to influence materially our decision as to the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel.

The opinion of M. Renan concerning this Gospel is especially interesting. We may, perhaps, question whether he would have approximated so closely to the traditional view, had not his peculiar theory of hallucination rendered the admissions innocuous in his eyes, so far as the general rationalistic position is concerned. But the hallucination hypothesis must stand or fall by its own merits; and, meanwhile, the significance of his literary judgment is noteworthy. His varying attitude toward the Fourth Gospel is fairly

described by Dr. Wace. "It has fluctuated in a very singular manner; but on one point it has not altered. In the first edition of his *Life of Jesus*, and in the sixth volume of his *Origins of Christianity*, he confesses himself greatly struck by the incidental indications of authenticity presented by the Fourth Gospel. He notices the 'slight traces of precision'; the 'freshness of its reminiscences,' 'like those of old age'; the little touches of detail — 'It was the sixth hour'; 'It was night'; 'The man's name was Malchus'; 'They had made a fire of coals, for it was cold,' and the like. But, on the other hand, he cannot endure the discourses which are attributed to our Lord in that Gospel. He calls them 'prolix,' 'arid,' 'interminable,' 'full of abstruse metaphysics and personal allegations.' He is thus divided between the conviction, on the one hand, of the authenticity of the Gospel which is forced on him by the narrative portions of it, and the doubts of its authenticity, on the other hand, which arise from his inability to appreciate the discourses of our Saviour. Between these opposing influences he has oscillated, now regarding the Gospel as substantially the work of St. John, although edited and retouched by his disciples, and again supposing that it was not the work of St. John, but of one of his disciples, the discourses being factitious, but the narrative parts, including precious traditions,

being due to St. John. His final conclusion, in his sixth volume, embodies these contradictions in their most remarkable form. 'The Fourth Gospel,' we are told, 'though a writing of no value for the purpose of knowing how Jesus spoke, is superior to the other three in respect to matters of fact.' Could there be a more extraordinary phenomenon than this — a work which possesses in the highest degree the value of an eye-witness's report on the deeds of the person of whom it speaks, but which is of no value at all in respect to his words?"[1] The opinion of M. Renan as to the discourses of Jesus in St. John's Gospel needs no comment; but his admissions in regard to the record of events are a striking witness to the weight of argument in favour of St. John's authorship.

The Book of the Acts, while it does not bear directly on the authenticity of the Gospel narrative, has yet a special importance, in this connection, because of the relation in which it stands to the Third Gospel. Tradition says that St. Luke, being a personal companion of St. Paul, gives us in his Gospel that form of the common tradition, upon which the Apostle to the Gentiles based his teaching. This would lend Apostolic authority to the Third Gospel, and bring it into touch with the testimony of eye-witnesses. As it is generally acknowledged that the Third Gospel and the

[1] *The Gospel and its Witnesses*, p. 33.

Acts are from the same hand, the authorship of the latter becomes of great Apologetic interest.

The external evidence for the Book of the Acts is even stronger than that for the Gospels. Meanwhile, the influence of the Tübingen school has told strongly against acceptance of the traditional view of its authorship. The "tendency" hypothesis absolutely requires that a late date be assigned to a history that represents St. Paul as working, from the first, in perfect accord with the other Apostles. But a theory that reconstructs history, regardless of the records, and then judges the latter according to their agreement with the arbitrary standard adopted, is untrue to the first principles of sound criticism. If we are to regard the book as in any sense an eirenicon, it is certainly not as mediating between a Pauline and a Petrine party: there are far plainer marks of an aim, on the writer's part, so to represent the relation of St. Paul to the Imperial authorities, as to soften the growing asperity between the Church and the Empire.[1]

The one greatest difficulty encountered, by those who deny that the writer was a companion of St. Paul, lies in adequately explaining, on this hypothesis, the so-called "we sections" of the book. These bear every mark of being the notes

[1] For much new light thrown on the Book of Acts see Ramsay's *Church in the Roman Empire*, and *St. Paul, the Traveller and the Roman Citizen.*

of an eye-witness, and are acknowledged as such by all competent critics. But when the attempt is made to sever them from the rest of the book, it is found that they are so interwoven with the narrative as a whole, and bear so many signs of the same authorship, that it becomes necessary to suppose that they were thoroughly worked over, before being incorporated into the Acts. Now, the author, whoever he be, is plainly no bungler. Above most of the other books of the New Testament, the Acts and the Third Gospel betray a skilful literary hand in their composition. How comes it, then, that if possessed of an older document, which he used freely, the writer should still have left the line of cleavage so plain, when he incorporated it into his own work? It would have been a simple matter, and have added literary unity to his history, if the first person had been altogether abandoned—unless, indeed, the author wished to mark that he was, on these occasions, personally present with St. Paul.

The fact that no use whatsoever is made of St. Paul's Epistles is in favour of the book's authenticity, rather than the reverse. It seems incredible, that a later writer, in reporting the speeches of the Apostle, should not have availed himself of material that lay ready to hand, and which would have given a familiar colouring to St. Paul's words. Meanwhile the speeches are not without traces of the Pauline diction, and differ from the Epistles,

only so far as the extempore speeches of a man of action might well differ from the same man's deliberate literary composition. It must be granted, that the parallelism, in the Acts, between certain incidents in the lives of St. Peter and St. Paul suggests design; and the emphasis laid upon it gives, at times, an impression of artificiality. Moreover, it is not always easy to fit the events of St. Paul's life, incidentally referred to in the Epistles, into the outline of his biography furnished by the Acts. But it is as reasonable to attribute this to our own imperfect information, as to mistakes on the part of the historian. And it is one of the more noteworthy results of recent criticism, that it has brought to light many facts which strikingly corroborate St. Luke's accuracy; so that, on purely critical grounds, Prof. Ramsay is inclined to place him in the front rank of ancient historians.

There seems, then, no sufficient reason for doubting, that, in the Book of the Acts, we have a trustworthy history, from the hand of a personal companion of St. Paul. And, in so far as this conclusion is well-grounded, a new link is forged in the chain of evidence for the historic credibility of the Synoptic Gospels.

Another distinct line of argument, in favour of the Four Gospels as embodying a primitive tradition, can be drawn from the Epistles of St. Paul. We have already had occasion to

refer to the importance of St. Paul's testimony to the fact of the Resurrection. The consensus of opinion as to the date of Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans, gives us a point of leverage, the value of which can hardly be exaggerated. If, in writings undoubtedly falling within thirty years of the Crucifixion, we find a picture of Jesus Christ perfectly accordant with that contained in the Gospels, this at least proves that the latter is not the result of late legendary accretions. St. Paul held personal converse with the immediate disciples of Jesus Christ; and there is no ground for doubting that what he taught concerning Christ's Person reflects the universal belief of the Apostolic Church. For, in his sharpest polemics, there is no apology for his Christological doctrine; this he plainly deemed unassailable, even his enemies and detractors were at one with him in this.

The pre-existence of Christ is taught, by implication, as clearly as in the prologue to the Fourth Gospel. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him." Jesus

Christ is sinless; "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." He is one with the Eternal Truth; "For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."[1] He is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption unto men.[2] These quotations could be indefinitely multiplied, were we to turn to the Epistles of the Captivity. And it is fair to say that the latter are attested by just as strong external evidence as the Epistles from which we have quoted. But it is not necessary to go beyond those letters that all acknowledge, to establish sufficiently the divine attributes of Christ, according to St. Paul's teaching.

It is remarkable that the Apostle makes so little direct use of the sayings of Jesus Christ, which must, at least, have been current in the oral Gospel, and that he refers so infrequently to events in our Lord's earthly life. But it is impossible that this should have been due entirely to ignorance on his part. We are rather to infer that he takes a knowledge of the Gospel narrative for granted, and that the special purpose with which he wrote led him to build on the Gospel as a foundation, instead

[1] Gal. iv. 4, 5; 1 Cor. viii. 6; 2 Cor. v. 21; 2 Cor. i. 20.

[2] 1 Cor. i. 30.

of repeating its incidents. Yet even so, we find many references to the earthly life and character of Jesus scattered through St. Paul's Epistles. "For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me." "Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again."[1] In accord with the picture of the judgment, set forth by Jesus in the Gospels, we find St. Paul appealing to that day—"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."[2] There are also distinct statements concerning the Institution of the Eucharist, the Betrayal, the Crucifixion, the Burial, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Heavenly Reign of Christ. Thus, in St. Paul, we have the chief facts of the narrative of the Evangelists confirmed by a witness, regarding whose identity and date there can be no question.

When we turn to the internal evidence for

[1] Rom. xv. 3; 2 Cor. x. 1; 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.
[2] 2 Cor. v. 10.

the trustworthiness of the Gospels, we find that many of the strongest arguments are such, that any careful student of Scripture can weigh them for himself, though he be ignorant of all critical technicalities. Let us confess frankly that we are confronted with certain discrepancies in the four accounts. Old-fashioned attempts at a formal harmonising of the Gospels are more or less discredited; they impress us too often by their ingenuity rather than by their ingenuousness. The fact that the Gospel passed through a period of oral transmission, before it was written down in the exact form in which we now possess it, while not detracting from its authority, partly explains how divergencies might arise. Many seeming contradictions may be due entirely to our ignorance. But, granting that some actually exist, they become insignificant, in the light of the wonderful consistency which marks the Gospels in all that concerns the moral and spiritual character of their message.

Let any one read, for instance, the history of the Passion, which occupies so large a share of our Lord's life, as recorded by all four Evangelists. Let him consider well all that is involved in the telling of that straightforward story. Whatever the date of their compilation, the Gospels took shape in the midst of a Society which unquestioningly looked to the Apostles as its most glorious representatives. They were

men held in deepest veneration, not only for their sanctity, but because of their having been personal companions of our Lord. What part should we have expected them to play, in an idealised history of the awful events connected with the last days of the earthly life of Jesus? Surely, one widely contrasted with that which is actually presented in the narrative as it now lies before us. These, the leaders and the saints of the Church, are here set forth as grossly ignorant of the real significance of the supreme crisis that is impending; they are disheartened at seeming failure, arrant cowards in the desertion of their Master; the chief among them denies his Lord with an oath. There is no slightest attempt to gloze over these facts; they are told in simple words, without palliation or apology. The figure of Jesus Christ Himself is touched with the pathos of an irresistible truthfulness. The Evangelists, when they wrote this history, adored Him as the Son of God, reigning on the right hand of the Father; yet the picture drawn of the suffering Christ is relieved by scarce a ray of the heavenly triumph. The Agony in the Garden; the anguish of the Crucifixion; the mysterious cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"—who can read the story and doubt that it is a simple transcript of fact? But the honesty here evinced is reflected back upon the rest of the narrative. If romance and legend will not account

for the later scenes, it is presumptuous to deny to the rest similar good faith and historic fidelity; for the tone of the Gospels is singularly consistent throughout.

But why lay exclusive stress on the history of the Passion? One supreme test can be applied to the whole course of the recorded life, namely, the character of Jesus Christ. That character as portrayed in the Gospels is absolutely consistent; it never lapses from its unapproachable height of moral perfection. Exquisite in its gentleness and sympathy, awful in the majesty of its holiness and power, it convinces the world by sheer force of incomparable beauty. The Evangelists are unerring in this portraiture; they fall into no contradictions; the pen never slips so as to mar, in any measure, the impressiveness of this, the central Figure of their story. Whatever theory we may entertain as to the composition of the Gospels, their authors must be regarded as relatively independent witnesses. That, under these circumstances, they should have succeeded in depicting a character that is unrivalled in its moral grandeur, and at the same time perfectly harmonious and at unity with itself, is a marvel unparalleled in the whole range of literature. The fact would seem to raise them above all cavil as reporters of truth.

Thus converging lines of evidence go to prove the substantial trustworthiness of the

Christian records. Jesus Christ is, at the least, the very embodiment of intense and searching truthfulness. The Evangelists, and those whose testimony they record, lived in the blaze of this truth, and devoted their lives to its service. They were themselves transfigured morally, and moreover, after-history has proved them right in their confidence regarding the triumph of the Messianic Kingdom. Of their good faith there is no question. The problem, then, resolves itself into this—were they, or were they not, competent to pass judgment on matters of fact, which they had every opportunity to verify?

Because many of these facts are unique, as they must have been if the divine claim of Christ be true, are we therefore forced by reason to deny them? It is somewhat sophistical to profess willingness to investigate candidly the claims of Christ, and then, because these claims are substantiated in the only way in which it is possible for them to be, to make this a ground of rejection. Such a procedure is perilously near to reasoning in a circle, which is never likely to advance us far in the pursuit of truth. Yet, unphilosophical as this method manifestly is, it does not lack distinguished advocates, when the question at issue is the life of Jesus Christ recorded in the Gospels.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WITNESS OF PROPHECY

It is frequently assumed that Apologetic argument, based on prophecy, has received its death-blow. The best scholarship of the day denies the Messianic bearing of many proof-texts, on which a former generation confidently relied; and criticism has played havoc with the most striking instances of miraculous prediction. We must all acknowledge the dreariness of fighting the ground, inch by inch, in defence of some traditional interpretation, which a more thorough-going exegesis has shown to be untenable, according to the canons of common sense. But if this leading of a forlorn hope be disheartening to the individual, it has other and more serious consequences. It is prejudicial to the whole subject of Apologetics, and tends to render it distasteful to fair-minded men. Wisdom and honesty both prompt to the admission, that much of the old argument from prophecy is hopelessly discredited; to try to rehabilitate it, is a tactical blunder of the first magnitude.

That argument may be stated somewhat crudely, but with substantial accuracy, as follows. By immediate divine revelation, a number of men, centuries before the Birth of Christ, minutely predicted the exact circumstances of His earthly life and character. The New Testament record is accordingly to be fitted into the prophetic literature, as the pieces of a child's cardboard puzzle are matched together. And the detailed coincidences between prophecy and fulfilment are to be regarded as proof that the entire scheme is of divine origin.

On the whole, it seems likely that the healthy sentiment of the present age would have been revolted by this mode of reasoning, even if criticism had left the crucial passages of the Old Testament untouched. The higher trend of modern thought is toward a dynamic rather than a mechanical conception of the universe. When one stops to consider the matter calmly, it certainly seems somewhat unworthy of God that prophets should have uttered their message, with the main intent of bolstering up the faith of later days, by furnishing a miraculous parallel to the Evangelic history. The mere foretelling of an isolated event that is to happen centuries hence, can be considered a spiritual revelation, only by a somewhat roundabout process of thought. It could surely have little bearing on the religious life of those who first spoke the

message, or those who hearkened to it. Meanwhile, an honest study of the prophetic literature itself gives little support to such an interpretation. If one thing more than another impresses us in the Hebrew prophets, it is the vitality of their relationship to their own age. There is no slightest trace that they regarded themselves as mere passive instruments for registering future events. Their self-surrender to God is, indeed, complete; they are swept irresistibly onward by the power of a divine inspiration, uttering words which are not their own; but the message is always of immediate import, interpreting life, counselling in present exigencies, denouncing judgment and promising salvation as an imminent experience, pressing hard toward fulfilment. When the future is unveiled before them, it is always a future pregnant with significance for the present. Faith, in its fervour, may unseal the eye so that its forward glance overleaps centuries; but the revelation has to do with the unfolding of eternal principles of God's providence, rather than with the adventitious circumstances of specific events.

By way of reaction against the mechanical view of the prophetic function, great stress is sometimes laid on the fact, that the prophets were the statesmen and social reformers of Israel. But we must be careful not to let this truth obscure the essentially religious character of their mission.

They were, above all else, men in whom the consciousness of God and His righteousness was the one intense reality upon which all the relations of life hinged. The policy of the state was judged with reference to this; the abuses of social life were denounced, because they outraged God; formalism in religion was the subject of scathing rebuke, because God demanded a spiritual service.

It is difficult for us to estimate the unique moral import of the prophets, and the place of pre-eminence that should be assigned them, just because their ethical insight was so unerring that its fruits have been incorporated into the innermost structure of the world's morality. Their most striking innovations have become the very groundwork of our moral and religious consciousness. This ought not to blind us, however, to the distinctiveness and originality of the whole prophetic movement. Widely differing in temperament and environment, one characteristic binds the long succession of prophets into unity, and that, a trait, which at first seems strangely paradoxical. Although the sternest censors of contemporary morals — although overwhelmed with a sense of the disparity between the ideal and the actual, so that their rebuke of the prevalent unrighteousness rings habitually with the sharpest words of denunciation—they are, at the same time, one and all, filled with an irrepressible hope. Whenever the burden of woe

seems to have reached its uttermost limit, suddenly there bursts forth a note of praise and thanksgiving, as though God had already accomplished His salvation. Truly, some wonderful vision must have been unfolded before them — the righteousness of God as revealed must have been touched with an unspeakable tenderness of love — to have thus assured their hearts in the midst of desolation, and made them the most consistent optimists that the world has ever seen. A consciousness of world-wide mission; an increasing sense of the nation's inadequacy to the task laid upon it; an indestructible faith that God's own arm would bring salvation; out of these germs was developed, with ever-growing clearness, the great Messianic hope which found its fruition in Jesus Christ.

But before tracing the outline of this hope, as it appears in the writings of the prophets, it will be well to turn to the interpretation of prophecy that we find in the New Testament. Undoubtedly, at first sight, the usage of the Evangelists seems to give some colour of justification to the method upon which we have passed such severe strictures. This is not so evident in the words that are attributed to our Lord in the Gospels. These are entirely consonant with the broader view of prophecy suggested above. He claims, indeed, to fulfil perfectly

the Messianic hope of Israel. This He does, by implication, in assuming the title, Son of Man, and in asserting that His mission is to establish the Kingdom of God foretold by the prophets. And, again, He says plainly, "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of Me."[1] Not only the Prophets, but the Law of Moses and the Psalms contain much that can find perfect fulfilment in Himself alone.[2] Moreover, He recognises the inner necessity that through suffering and death the world must be redeemed, and links this with the picture, drawn centuries before, of the "Man of Sorrows."[3] And in the synagogue at Nazareth, when He had read the passage from Isaiah descriptive of the acceptable year of the Lord, His words are explicit—"This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."[4] But, in all these instances, the reference is to great, underlying principles of the Messianic Kingdom. The prophets are full of Christ, because visions of the coming salvation, in its broadest outlines, have been vouchsafed them.

When, however, we turn to the comments of the Evangelists themselves, a somewhat different emphasis appears to be laid on the purely predictive element in prophecy. Of course, many

[1] St. John v. 39, R.V. [2] St. Luke xxiv. 44.
[3] St. Matt. xxvi. 54; St. Luke xxii. 37. [4] St. Luke iv. 21.

will deny that we have any right to draw so sharp a line of distinction. They hold that the Gospels perfectly reflect Apostolic tradition; the Twelve must have been familiar with our Lord's own exegesis of the Old Testament, as bearing on His work; hence His authority may be claimed for all interpretations of prophecy that are found in the Gospel record. But, in view of the prevailing theories of the composite authorship of the Gospels, it is hardly wise to press this argument. In any event, it is useless to deny that those little particles of transition, denoting purpose, where to us result would have seemed more natural, present a serious stumbling-block to the modern mind. Not only do the Evangelists appear to regard prophecy as containing minute prediction, but it is as though the prophecy determined the event. When we look beneath the surface, however, we find that this usage illustrates some of the most distinctive characteristics of Hebrew thought. The accent always lies rather on the divine than the human. For instance, while man's moral responsibility is clearly taught throughout Scripture, passages can be cited, where the expression seems almost to deny man's freedom, in the interests of the counter-truth of the supreme sovereignty of God. The fulfilment of God's unchanging purpose swallows up, for the time, all consideration of

secondary causes. Thus each step in the life of Jesus is foreordained; it is but the carrying out of some special aspect of the eternal counsel concerning the Messiah. Moreover, the Messiah was, for the Evangelists, bound up with the whole mission and experience of His people. The long history of the nation was incomplete in itself; it waited for its interpretation and its perfecting in Him. Accordingly, the phrase, "in order that it might be fulfilled," has a deeper intention than merely to accredit words of prophecy; it points out that the goal of Israel's history has been reached; what prior events dimly adumbrated, has found perfect realisation in Jesus Christ.

It is questionable, whether the usage of the Evangelists implies that, in all cases, they regarded the Old Testament references as direct prophecy in the same sense as that adopted by modern Apologists, when they rest the weight of their argument upon explicit prediction. Upon any interpretation, based on the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, He is the unifying centre of the Old Testament as well as of the New. The Bible cannot be understood save in the light of His Person. As He is the Prophet, Priest, and King, toward whom the whole history of Israel looked forward, every human exemplar who exercised royal, priestly, or prophetic function, may well

have foreshadowed some trait or characteristic which could find its complete fulfilment in Him alone. If it be true that Israel was divinely guided, that eternal principles of God's salvation found expression in the successive stages of its history, typical prophecy will, of necessity, be intertwined with every fibre of the national life. And for purposes of devotional edification, it is permissible to trace minute forecasts of the earthly life of Jesus, in many a passage, where a strictly scientific exegesis would fail to discover any Messianic reference. We must always bear in mind that the Gospels are written with a purely religious intent. Their method is not that of a critical history. And it is a totally different thing, to idealise, for instance, the sufferer of the twenty-second Psalm, and see foreshadowed there the supreme agony of the Cross, in order to drive home the mystery of vicarious atonement which has ever been the profoundest principle of self-sacrificing love; and, on the other hand, to claim, that because the Psalmist prophesied of Christ's death, therefore we have sure proof that God miraculously enlightened his mind concerning the future. We have no interest in denying that the New Testament writers may have been, to some extent, under the influence of those laws of rabbinic interpretation which now seem to us artificial. But the application of this principle of typical

prophecy helps to explain many of their references to the Old Testament, which otherwise might appear to be strained and unnatural.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews sums up the distinctive character of the revelation of God through the prophets, in the phrase, "by divers portions and in divers manners." If we go to the Old Testament with any hope of finding there a portrait of the Messiah, consistent in all its parts, we are doomed to disappointment. Fragmentariness is the impression left on our minds, as we trace the thread of Messianic prophecy through its varying course. The hope of a mighty restitution to be wrought by God is the common possession of all; but, in drawing the picture in detail, each prophet is largely influenced by the bent of his natural endowment, as also by the special conditions of the national life at the time of his ministry.

In the earlier chapters of Isaiah, the symbols, under which the ideal is set forth, have a predominantly political cast. A king shall reign in righteousness; and so resplendent is his power, that all the terms of rhetoric are exhausted to describe his majesty and his glory. The kingdom that he shall establish is one of universal peace, centring in the Holy City; "for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." This series of prophecies culminates in that outburst of praise, which rings

forth a veritable Christmas anthem: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with judgment and with righteousness, from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall perform this."[1] These are startling words, falling from the lips of a Hebrew; for they seem to describe the Messianic King as possessing all the attributes of the divine nature. But it makes no difference to our argument, whether Isaiah was, indeed, so carried by the Spirit beyond the limitations of Hebrew thought, as to catch a glimpse of the Christian mystery of Incarnation, or whether the terms are to be regarded as merely figurative, applying to the king as the vicegerent of God. It is enough, that Isaiah depicts the Messiah as perfecting the promises of the Covenant, and establishing the reign of Jehovah on earth,—the full and final revelation of God's mercy.

Although these prophecies centre in the glorification of Jerusalem, signs are not wanting that the prophetic consciousness was capable of rising to the broadest universalism. Sometimes we

[1] Isa. ix. 6, 7, R.V.

can detect traces of national aggrandisement in the picture of the nations flocking to Jerusalem, and laying hold of the skirt of him who is a Jew, saying, "We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you."[1] But what can be more astonishing than when a prophet, of the most exclusive of the nations, declares concerning its bitterest enemies—"In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth: for that the Lord of Hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance"?[2]

In Jeremiah, the prophecy concerning the King is touched with a deeper ethical significance; "this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."[3] His reign is to be instituted by a New Covenant, when the law shall no longer be written on tables of stone, but in the hearts of His people. The same promise finds place in Ezekiel, whose description of the Messianic Kingdom is set forth under the type of a restored Temple and re-established ritual worship; "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."[4]

It is a mistake to narrow down the Messianic

[1] Zech. viii. 23.
[2] Isa. xix. 24, 25, R.V.
[3] Jer. xxiii. 6.
[4] Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

promise to those passages where distinct reference is made to a king of the house of David. Parallel with these, stand many prophecies where the eye of the seer is turned upon the kingdom rather than the king. Here, again, the picture varies—now, the political aspect dominates, and the victory of Jerusalem over all her foes is the leading feature—then again, we have highly spiritualised conceptions of a realm where holiness finds perfect realisation. The beautiful passage in Isaiah (xxxii. 2), which has been appropriated by the Christian heart as wonderfully portraying the refuge afforded by Jesus Christ amidst the world's afflictions, more probably, in its primary signification, refers to the character that is to prevail universally in that great day of final regeneration. Then shall *every man* be as a hiding-place and a covert for his brother, "as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

It is an interesting indication of the influence exerted over the Messianic ideal by the fortunes of Israel's external history, that in the later prophets of the Chaldean period, up to the time of the exile, stress ceases to be laid on the coming of the King, and the interest begins to centre more exclusively in the People of God, as representative of Jehovah and the hope of the future. This tendency becomes paramount in the time of the exile; and if Isaiah xl.–lxvi. is to be attri-

buted to this period, it is a striking fact that here, where prophecy reaches its culmination of spiritual insight, there is no mention whatsoever of the Messianic King. God has been testing His people in the furnace of affliction. All hopes of earthly dominion and of national pre-eminence seem forgotten. Now it is, that God drives home to the heart of the prophet the profoundest lesson of the Christ-life, and victory is seen to consist in utter self-sacrifice. A new hope dawns; God's love is mighty to redeem all things, even what has been esteemed lowliest and most wretched in human life. It is of secondary importance, whether the figure of the Suffering Servant was originally intended to personify Israel, or was recognised by the prophet as pointing to an individual Intercessor and Saviour. Strong arguments can be adduced for both conclusions. But as the prophetic intensity deepens, until it reaches its climax in the fifty-third chapter, it becomes increasingly difficult to believe that the sole reference is to a priestly people. The eye of the prophet seems to be dwelling on the lineaments of a friend whom he already knows and loves. There is the indescribable touch of an ardent personal devotion, in the portraiture. The underlying principle, however, remains the same, in either case. Prophecy has now reached its fullest apprehension of the nature of the divine salvation. Through suffering and death, love, divine and

eternal, shall triumph over all obstacles and redeem the world.

In subsequent prophecies, the Messianic King again appears, but now with the added attributes of the Priest, exercising mediatorial powers. It is, perhaps, doubtful whether the kingly and priestly functions are always conjoined in one person. Sometimes the conception seems to be rather that of a double Messiah, a Priest and a King, sitting together on the throne.[1] But, in so far as this latter conception prevails, we have but another illustration of the way in which, throughout the whole course of Messianic prophecy, seemingly contradictory elements are placed in closest juxtaposition, with no attempt to mediate between them or harmonise the opposition. It is as though different aspects of the Messianic salvation were flashed upon the eye of the prophet, but no power were given him to weld them into perfect unity.

Cursory as our review of the subject has been, it is perhaps sufficient to give a hint as to the kind of argument which can be legitimately drawn from prophecy, to establish the claim of Jesus Christ to our allegiance. In formulating that argument, we cannot do better than to take as our point of departure a statement of Dr. Sanday, which clearly summarises the real significance of Hebrew prophecy:—"The dis-

[1] See Riehm's *Messianic Prophecy*, p. 199 and note.

tinguishing characteristic of the prophets, first of their speech and action and afterwards of their writings, was the firm and unwavering belief that they were instruments or organs of the Most High, and that the thoughts which arose in their minds about Him and His Will, and the commands and exhortations which they issued in His Name, really came at His prompting, and were really invested with His authority. There is no alternative between accepting this belief as true and regarding it as a product of mental disease and delusion. But to bring such a charge, not against a few individuals but against the whole line of prophets from Moses or Samuel to Malachi, is a step from which most of us would shrink. And the charge is refuted in advance by the contents of the prophecies themselves, which, if once we allow that there is a God, make those affirmations about Him which the world has pronounced to be the best and truest, and which it has taken as the centre of its beliefs to this day."[1]

We have thus, on the one hand, a hope grounded in divine revelation, which had inspired Israel for centuries before the coming of Jesus Christ. And, as an answer to this hope, we find the one Man, whose character perfectly meets the moral ideal of the ages, accepting the prophecies as applicable to Himself, and claiming

[1] Sanday, *Inspiration*, p. 394.

to be the promised Messiah. Secular history bears wonderful testimony to the fact, that the fulness of times had come. The drawing of the world together within the vast unity of the Roman Empire—the prevalence of Greek culture, which, in manifold ways, subserved the preaching of a universal Gospel—were plainly purposed, each in its degree, to prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight. But the moral and spiritual preparation of Hebrew prophecy bears even more manifest marks of God's providential design.

One obvious difficulty, which suggested itself from the first, was met long ago by St. Paul, in the course of his argument in the Epistle to the Romans. The nation, whose privilege it was to bear special testimony to the Messiah, failed, as a nation, to recognise the divine fulfilment, when it was at last vouchsafed. But however interpreted in the light of God's world-wide providence, this fact, at least, further illustrates the deep insight of the prophets, who gave warning long before that it was only a righteous remnant, as the gleaning of an olive-tree, that should be saved.

In Jesus Christ, all the paradoxes which meet us in the Messianic forecast of the prophets, find natural solution. He is Himself the Key necessary to the interpretation of prophecy. Without Him, the apparent contradictions must

have remained irreconcilable; we now behold them harmonised in the wonderful unity of His divine Person.

Exception may be taken to this line of reasoning, on two widely different grounds. On the one hand, it is objected that the interpretation put upon prophecy is forced; that we read Christ into the Old Testament, by an unjustifiable spiritualising of its language. On the other hand, it is urged that the very conception of the Christ was derived from prophecy, and that this product of Messianic dreams has been erroneously identified with the historical Jesus.

By our assertion that Jesus Christ is the Key to prophecy, it might seem as though, in reality, we were begging the whole question; for are we not suiting the prophecy to the event, while professing to establish the event by means of the prophecy? But, plainly, if there be such a thing as prophecy, it cannot be perfectly understood until fulfilment has revealed the abundance of its content. We have been protesting against that construction of prophecy, which implies that the prophets themselves clearly foresaw the exact nature of the Messianic salvation. Nor have we sought baldly to substantiate the life of Christ by means of prediction. Our aim has been rather to read in history some faint traces, at least, of those

wonderful providential leadings, whereby God prepared the heart of His people for the fuller revelations of divine truth. We must needs begin with Jesus Christ, and read both past and future in the light that shines from His Person.

If we are told that this is to spiritualise the Old Testament prophecies until they are made to bear any application we choose, it might be answered that, as no other general application than the one suggested has ever actually been made, the charge is sufficiently refuted by facts. But further, the word "spiritualise" cannot be made a ground of reproach; for we have not been contending for that view of prophecy which conceives that minute details of future history are revealed by God. Great principles of truth and righteousness are revealed; and by God's Spirit the prophet is often enabled to forecast how these will work together to produce certain events. But, for the most part, these visions of the future are veiled under symbolic forms, borrowed from the immediate historic environment of the prophet. The deeper the prophet's spirituality, the less do temporary forms obscure the vision; and when we reach the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, the charge of "spiritualising" falls away of itself. Meanwhile, to seek the kernel of abiding truth, concealed under the more carnal representations of regal power

and material prosperity, which characterise the prophetic picture of the Kingdom of God, is strictly in accord with the point of view adopted from the first.

Orthodoxy first reads Christ into the Old Testament, and then triumphantly produces His presence there, as evidence of the truth of His divine claim — thus runs one critical objection. But the more prevalent theory assumes the very opposite ground, namely, that the Christ of the Gospels is the *result* of Messianic prophecy. The long-cherished expectation among the Jews was fanned into a flame by St. John Baptist; and when Jesus appeared, He was straightway endued, by the popular imagination, with the attributes of the traditional Messiah. In the picture presented to us in the Gospels, we may catch faint glimpses of the historic Jesus; but His true character is overlaid with conceptions drawn, not only from the older prophetic literature, but from the numerous apocalyptic writings of later origin. The upholders of this theory are, however, straightway divided into two schools over the question, whether Jesus Himself shared in the delusion that He was possessed of Messianic powers, or whether, on the other hand, the mistake is to be laid solely to the narrow and fanatical zeal of His followers. The finer instincts of reverence incline many to choose the latter alternative; but this, at a somewhat

excessive cost of probability. Dr. Martineau goes so far as to deny that Jesus ever appropriated to Himself the title, Son of Man; for, he maintains, this would have been to give countenance to the crudest prejudices of contemporary Judaism. So extravagant a theory as this will find few advocates, for it involves the virtual confession that we have no trustworthy record whatever of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. But even under the guise of more cautious criticism, the assumption that Jesus did not explicitly claim the prerogatives of the Messiah is purely arbitrary. Moreover, the scorn cast, by implication, on the Messianic hopes of Israel, as though they had been the chief factor in degrading the Evangelic tradition, argues a strange incapacity to appreciate the deep spirituality of the whole prophetic movement. The Old Covenant is, in effect, emptied of its divine content, and we can no longer regard it as, in any real sense, a preparation for the revelation of the Gospel. We have called the assumption arbitrary, because there is no shadow of direct evidence, that the character of Jesus Christ was developed by His biographers out of a mass of heterogeneous material. Even though we were to grant that all the separate traits of that character had been previously portrayed by the prophets, we have found that in their original context they are confused and

often contradictory. Meanwhile, the character of Jesus Christ is exquisitely harmonious: it is hard to see how the most purblind criticism can consider it to be a mere patchwork, constructed out of fragments of an ancient literature. His figure, as it stands before us in the Gospel story, leaves an impression of a distinct and powerful personality, which is the exact reverse of what could be expected from this hypothetical process of development. Familiar prophecies may have led the Evangelists to lay an added emphasis on certain incidents in our Lord's career. Certain apocalyptic sayings, attributed to Him, may have been coloured by the same influence. But the essential originality of the Gospel remains absolutely untouched by these admissions. No more improbable theory could well be propounded than this, which attributes the character of Jesus Christ to the ingenuity of human inventiveness, provided with material drawn from the Old Testament Scripture.

What, then, are we to conclude is the Apologetic value of the witness of prophecy? Divorced from the moral and spiritual appeal of Christ to the heart and conscience, it proves nothing; there are no magical coincidences to startle the unbeliever, and compel acceptance of Jesus Christ. To a superficial view, there is reason in the plea, once put forward in the writer's presence by a thoughtful and cultivated man. "I cannot see,"

he said, "how the prophets can be adduced as witnessing to the truth of the Gospel. They were utterly mistaken in their expectations of a triumphant restoration of Israel; and, so far from preparing the way for Christ, the very people to whom they prophesied were the first to reject Him." There is no answer to this, save once more to point out that the principles for which the prophets stood, and which have been triumphantly vindicated by the event, lie deep beneath the surface. Sometimes the Messianic hope seems to waver and grow dim, or it is veiled under symbols which obscure its spiritual import. Only now and again, on mountain-tops of vision, does it flash forth with clearness, and plainly foreshow the love of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. But, in one form or another, it persists throughout the length of Israel's history, indestructible, giving an uplift and an inspiration, unparalleled in any other religion of the ancient world. And, in this line of prophecy, we have a link connecting the revelation of God in Jesus Christ with the great onward course of the religious evolution of the race. Without this link, the Gospel might seem sporadic and isolated, out of relation with all prior history. Now, it is seen to be the crowning glory of a long process of development, the culmination and fruition of Israel's special mission as the Chosen People of God.

Prophets foretold a King of righteousness; and, behold, He reigns. All nations were to be gathered into His Kingdom; and the Catholic Church is spread over the whole earth. Blessings innumerable were to be the heritage of His servants; and the testimony of the saints assures us that the promise has been abundantly fulfilled. His triumph was prefigured, as strangely involved in the mystery of pain and suffering and death; and, lo, the Cross of Christ has revealed the secret, whereby all things are made new and through love redeemed to God.

This is sufficient to give pause, at least, to the man who believes that God's hand is in history, and that we may read there the traces of a revelation of the Eternal Will.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE DEMONSTRATION OF THE SPIRIT

We have sketched in outline a method of Christian Apology, which attempts to adapt itself to the peculiar exigencies of the present age. The principles that govern the course of the argument, in the foregoing pages, should be kept distinct from the detailed application and illustration of those principles. It may well be that the latter are very imperfect and unconvincing, while the principles themselves are sound and irrefutable. In order that the general line of reasoning may stand out clearly, freed from all adventitious matter which might obscure its cogency, we will briefly summarise the main points of the argument that we have been pursuing.

Recognising the avidity of the modern mind for facts, facts that are plain and indisputable, we made this our point of departure. We began with the character of Jesus Christ as portrayed in the Gospels, a character unrivalled in its beauty and the sway that it has gained over the hearts of men. The moral pre-eminence of Jesus Christ,

and the unique influence that He has exercised in the subsequent history of the world, are facts which cannot be gainsaid. But facts demand an explanation, every effect presupposes a cause; in the interests of reason, we are driven to correlate facts, and seek the general law that they exemplify. Thus the character of Jesus Christ calls for the closest study, if we are to give account of so striking a phenomenon.

In the course of this study, we are brought face to face with the divine claim that He put forward, and it seems impossible to disentangle this from the human perfection, which has won supreme allegiance from the conscience of mankind. We can, indeed, ruthlessly cut away this claim; but to do so, is to destroy utterly the integrity of our only source of information concerning the character of Jesus Christ; and the figure left, after this process of excision, is thin and bloodless, emphatically *not* the Christ who has won the victories of which we are seeking explanation.

We are next confronted with the alleged fact of the Resurrection. This event cannot be viewed in isolation, as a mere marvel, for it is closely allied to startling moral and spiritual phenomena. It is a turning-point in history, inasmuch as the faith that transformed the character of the Apostles centred in its acceptance: and it was the keynote of the preaching that

converted the world. Moreover, we find that nineteen hundred years have failed to produce a theory concerning this widespread belief, which in any degree adequately accounts for it, save on the supposition that the event actually occurred.

In examining the records that chronicle the life of Jesus Christ, we find them as well attested by external evidence as other documents of relatively the same age. And, among the internal evidences of their trustworthiness, are some which appear to be of overwhelming force. The extraordinary consistency of the character of Jesus Christ, as set forth in the Four Gospels; the air of verisimilitude in the history of the Passion; these are facts that vouch for the substantial accuracy of the records, and far out-weigh certain apparent discrepancies as to minor events.

And finally, when we ask what relation Jesus Christ holds to the religious development of the pre-Christian world, whether there are signs of preparation for His coming; we are met by the Messianic hope of the long line of Hebrew prophets, a hope that has found perfect fulfilment in Him. Moreover, Jesus Christ claimed the witness of prophecy as certifying to His divine claim. This fact, taken in conjunction with His acknowledged spiritual insight, becomes of signal moment in estimating the religious import of His life and character.

Again and again, in the course of our argument, objections have been considered which seem to traverse our conclusions. But the force of the general line of reasoning is too strong to be seriously threatened. For, let it be borne in mind, we do not seek to prove anything whatsoever to demonstration. This was clearly avowed from the first. We aim only at clearing away obstructions, and establishing a probability. If it be made evident, that one may believe in Jesus Christ without doing despite to reason, we have attained our end. For further certitude, and full assurance of the truth of the Gospel, we must have recourse to other methods than those of inductive reasoning.

But although it be necessary, on occasion, to assume a somewhat dogmatic tone—and we hesitate to weaken the effectiveness of every positive statement, by constant qualification—nothing is gained in Apology by the slightest deflection from philosophic fairness. Very great difficulties remain, after the clearest presentment of the evidential argument. Whoever hopes to win a patient and sympathetic hearing to-day, must needs acknowledge these difficulties frankly and in all humility. Nothing so discredits the strength of the Christian position, in the eyes of an able antagonist, as ignoring the force of a counter-argument, which he knows has weight. There ought to be not only fearlessness but cor-

diality, on the part of the Apologist, in facing *facts*, from whatever quarter produced. He may never weary of the toil that meeting these facts entails. If they necessitate the readjustment of time-honoured arguments, let him not linger in making the concession. It cries shame on the Church, when Christian literature is less vital in its reactions than that which embodies the achievements of destructive criticism. Truth will prevail. The Christian advocate who is impatient, timorous, racked by over-anxiety concerning the issue, is guilty of a curious presumption. His task is a solemn one, and ought indeed to cause heart-searching as to personal fitness. But the little battlements that we erect, against some sudden feint or onset of unbelief, are insignificant, in comparison with the splendid reserves of strength possessed by the great citadel of the Faith. Good temper, fearless honesty, reverence and quietude of spirit, these alone become him who ventures to plead the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The difficulties that beset the believer are many and great; but so also are those which encompass the rationalistic position. Nothing could be more baseless than the notion that, if a man be rid of the Christian creed, he will no longer be haunted by scruples nor pressed hard by insoluble problems. Mr. Browning has put much clever sophistry into the mouth of his worldly-

wise bishop; but the simple truth asserts itself, when he says:—

> "And now what are we? unbelievers both,
> Calm and complete, determinately fixed
> To-day, to-morrow and for ever, pray?
> You'll guarantee me that? Not so, I think!
> In no wise! all we've gained is, that belief,
> As unbelief before, shakes us by fits,
> Confounds us like its predecessor. Where's
> The gain? how can we guard our unbelief,
> Make it bear fruit to us?—the problem here.
> Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,
> A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
> A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
> And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
> As old and new at once as nature's self,
> To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
> Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
> Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—
> The grand Perhaps! We look on helplessly.
> There the old misgivings, crooked questions are—
> This good God,—what He could do, if He would,
> Would, if He could—then must have done long since:
> If so, when, where, and how? Some way must be,—
> Once feel about, and soon or late you hit
> Some sense, in which it might be, after all,
> Why not, 'The Way, the Truth, the Life'?"[1]

First of all, there is the moral elevation of Jesus Christ to be explained on naturalistic grounds. Shall we, or shall we not, take Him as our Master? Every instinct of the heart prompts to the acknowledgment of His complete moral supremacy. But how reconcile this supremacy with His ante-

[1] *Bishop Blougram's Apology.*

cedents and environment? Whence came the catholicity of that teaching, which never grows old and never disappoints? How account for the unrivalled influence that He has exerted over all sorts and conditions of men? These questions press for an answer; they will not be postponed. No theory of morals can have any consistency, no practical evangel can hope for effectiveness, until the mind has tried conclusions with this central problem, and a definite decision has been reached.

Moreover, the character of Christ is hopelessly complicated, from the rationalistic point of view, with what must be esteemed the most gigantic blunder ever made by mortal man—the claim which He put forward that He is the Eternal Son of God. The purest and highest character is degraded by a blasphemous self-assertion that finds parallel only among the insane, and the lowest charlatans who have disgraced religious history. How has the unique influence of Christ for good maintained itself, thus handicapped? If Christ made no such claim, how can we disentangle truth and fiction? Are we not forced, in this case, to acknowledge that we know practically nothing of Him from whom the world has derived its noblest inspirations?

And then, it remains for us to account for the Resurrection story. The task seems easy, so long as we vaguely talk of myth and legend and excited visionaries; but it grows harder when details are

faced, and scientific precision is substituted for general allegations. At least, it is not work that one can undertake with a light heart—this robbing humanity of its Easter hope, the one ray of clear light cast on the awful mystery of death. And, after the most plausible explanations along naturalistic lines have been examined, a man must, in candour, confess that they are at the best extremely defective. One would like a little fuller assurance on so crucial a question. To be sure, the mind may be so biassed against the possibility of miracle, that any explanation will seem better than the acknowledgment of the fact; but this strong prepossession has no logical value, it is essentially as irrational as the veriest superstition, however congenial it may be to the passing temper of the age.

The literary problems presented by the New Testament are replete with difficulty, from whatever point of view they are approached. He alone can be sure that he has reached the ultimate solution, who resolutely shuts his eyes to one half of the evidence. The dogmatism of the Tübingen school, for instance, may be placed over against that which characterised the older conservatism. Certain questions may be regarded as substantially settled; but the points, on which there is still room for legitimate diversity of opinion, are innumerable. Meanwhile, the battle, on the whole, has not gone

against the believer. The rationalistic critic is still troubled by as many questionings as his more conservative opponent. There are countless evidences of minute accuracy and veracity, which rise to confound those who attempt to invalidate the authority of the Christian records.

And when a man has so far fortified his position that, on the whole, he deems it fairly impregnable, there still remains the practical question—what attitude shall he assume toward the Christian Church? It is the great conservator of morals; it elevates and inspires the mass of mankind; dare he set himself deliberately to wreck a faith that, in the main, performs so beneficent a service? The man of coarser temperament, who prides himself on rugged straightforwardness, at all hazards, and is indifferent to the harm that accrues from uprooting wheat and tares together, may see his path plain before him. But the scruples that must harass one of finer discernment, reverent in the presence of those ideals which have lured men on to righteousness, are many and grievous. Of course, if honest conviction compels, we must follow this road however hard. But scepticism has no monopoly of honesty. Where arguments are nicely balanced, the charge of unscrupulousness had best be altogether abandoned, let the final decision be what it may. But it is sheer sentimentality, to dwell upon the pathos of the Christian's ceaseless conflict with doubt, as

contrasted with the certainty in which the unbeliever luxuriates. The contrast exists only in the imagination of an enfeebled faith.

Whatever may be the larger interests subserved thereby, the fact is patent that we are placed, at present, amidst conditions that involve the intellectual side of religious truth in more or less of difficulty. The literary and historical evidence is not demonstrative, one way or the other. Our ultimate choice must depend largely on other considerations. It should serve to reconcile us, however, to this our fate, when we remember that intellectual demonstration and faith are incompatible. If the latter be essential to a true spiritual development, the very imperfection of the formal evidential argument may be a disguised blessing. Indeed, the demand for complete logical proof involves an absurdity. It would require that each link of a long chain of evidence be manifestly flawless; each assertion buttressed by an infallible authority that could not be gainsaid; and at the end of the process, we should be no nearer a spiritual goal than at the beginning, the soul would not be advanced one step toward an experimental knowledge of God. It is impossible for us to know, antecedently, just what degree of clear intellectual conviction best consists with a full and free spiritual development. Therefore, it ill becomes us to repine, because much is left obscure,

where the logical understanding craves demonstration.

We cleave, then, to the sunnier side of doubt. There can be no question that, if there be a God, no revelation of His character so satisfies the heart and conscience, as the good news heralded by Jesus Christ. It contains, for those who unreservedly surrender themselves to its dictates, a complete practical solution of the haunting questions—"Whence?" and "Whither?"

> ". . . the acknowledgment of God in Christ
> Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
> All questions in the earth and out of it,
> And has so far advanced thee to be wise."[1]

But it has been objected that this is tantamount to believing a thing, simply because we wish it to be true. To shelter ourselves behind the insistent demands of the heart, and to account the inner satisfaction experienced, as evidence in favour of an objective revelation, is nothing but thinly-disguised cowardice. What right have we to suppose that the universe answers to our demands? We are affrighted in the presence of nature's order, which heeds not our cries and our tears; therefore we put love at the heart of things, and say, "This must be true; it comforts and consoles me and gives me hope; therefore I will believe it."

This objection, however, though specious, is

[1] Browning's *Death in the Desert.*

thoroughly sophistical. In the first place, it is not optional with us, whether we will believe in the essential integrity of the universe; we *must* believe in it, in one form or another, or be reduced to intellectual confusion. The whole superstructure of science is built on the essential rationality of nature; and we have as good ground for believing that conscience gives a true report of the moral constitution of things, as that our minds find an answering reality in the material universe. But, it is *far from easy* to hold consistently to this point of view. Instead of affirming that the attitude of faith toward a God of love is cowardly, it were nearer truth to say that herein consists the noblest heroism of the spirit. Faith is encompassed with every sort of obstacle. The onward march of the world, in many of its aspects, seems cruelly indifferent to the interests of man. What of the hard struggle, in which the strong alone survive; the pain and suffering, scattered broadcast, with no evident sign of just apportionment; the inexorable severity of the destructive forces of nature?—it sometimes seems as though, verily, it were easier to believe in malevolence than love. But there are countervailing truths; there is beauty lavished in profusion over the face of nature; there is the keen joy of living, over against the pain; there is the vision of righteousness, stirring us to strenuous endeavour; there are the count-

less compensations of love and the enthusiasm of work. The soul is left to choose the category according to which it will construe the world. Shall it be the good or the bad? Shall it be hopeful or despairing? Shall we believe in love or hate? In just this choice lies the soul's probation. And who will say that the brave soul must choose the darker alternative? Desperation is not a synonym for courage. It is surely as noble to cast in one's lot with the highest, as to accept sadly the lowest conceivable interpretation of life. It is as brave to look forward cheerfully, to hope amidst the darkness, as to be filled with gloomy forecasts and believe that evil reigns.

And so with that revelation of eternal love which is proclaimed in Jesus Christ. If the Gospel be true, a light is cast upon the darkest problems, which dispels the gloom, and makes life doubly worth the living. It is not the instinct of cowardice that drives us to Him; it is manly eagerness to make the most of life. We must not contravene reason or conscience, for these are lights from God. But reason is found to oppose no insuperable barriers — nay, her finer intuitions are strikingly consonant with the deeper truths of the Gospel. Conscience finds its fullest satisfaction in the ideal presented in Jesus Christ. To hail Him, then, as Master, is not the last resort of feeble

souls; it is to put the highest value on life, to dare all for the noblest ends, to stake one's soul on the supremacy of love.

The prominence that has been given to the doctrine of probability may seem inconsistent with the full assurance of the true Christian believer. If proof falls short of demonstration, is it possible for us to emulate that splendid confidence that has always marked effective religious achievement? The very question reveals a certain confusion of thought. There is a path of demonstration, and the saints have always walked in it; but it lies, of necessity, far away from those scholastic lines of argument that are the subject-matter of formal Evidences. And yet, although Christian Apology is not immediately concerned with other than logical processes, it must always prove itself comparatively futile, unless, indirectly, it guides toward surer grounds of certitude than lie within its own proper sphere.

The first step along the path of spiritual demonstration is faith in the message of Christ, stirring to *action*. The emprise is not a rash one; it involves no intellectual disloyalty; for it commits to the acceptance of no doctrinal propositions. We all recognise that life is a somewhat difficult and complicated matter, at best; the network of social relationships yields a harvest of joy or sorrow, according to the

moral reaction of the individual. We long for a guiding clue, some principle of universal application that shall assure success. The message of Christ, as bearing on this practical problem, is worthy at least of serious consideration; and there is no way in which we can test it, save by putting it into practice. If that message were primarily a series of abstract propositions about God, it would be unreasonable to ask such a venture of faith, without previously justifying the demand by an exhaustive defence of Christ's authority. But, however the truth has been overlaid, the aim of the Gospel is, plainly, to lead men to an experimental knowledge of the life of God; and only secondarily, by way of inference, to inculcate what may be strictly termed a theological doctrine. We have, then, a perfect right to put Christ's teaching to the test of experience, even though we are, at the time, uncertain about all theoretic deductions from the Gospel narrative. For any man who will do this whole-heartedly, accepting no conventional interpretations, but seeking knowledge at its source, striking no compromise with conscience, but unreservedly surrendering himself to the spirit of the Master, there is sure to come a revelation of the originality and perennial power of the Gospel.

The distinctive characteristic of the ethics of

Christ consists in the place assigned to love, and in the novel interpretations that are put upon the word. In the Christian view, virtues cease to be virtues, save as irradiated and transformed by love. Justice, prudence, temperance, fortitude—these are not strong to stand alone. When they are but the fruit of a nicely-calculated selfishness, they develop a character more impervious to the influences of divine grace than that of the most abandoned sinner. While the centre is *self*, it is impossible that life should be other than immoral, that is, in direct antagonism to the Will of God. More particularly, it is only through love that we can interpret the true meaning of those virtues, which were first brought into prominence by the Gospel—humility, meekness, non-resistance. These graces must seem, not only unattractive, but positively repellent, save to those who are admitted to the secret of the great mystery of love. And, indeed, they not only seem unattractive, they are of the nature of vice rather than virtue, unless a positive element is infused into them by the fire of a self-abandoning service of others.

Herein, perhaps, lies the explanation why so many of the modern advocates of non-resistance seem to propound such paradoxical and impracticable theories. Non-resistance, in and of itself, is as impotent as any other empty negative. Logically, it is a mere abstraction, landing us

in nihilism and anarchy. It has value only as breaking down barriers, so that the ardour of self-sacrificing devotion may have free course, binding man to man in a fellowship pregnant with spiritual blessing. Until the impulse of love is strong enough to enter in and take complete possession, society, as a whole, cannot forego the use of safeguards against the unlicensed passions of evil men. But this does not preclude the individual from the practice of non-resistance; and he is bound, as a follower of Christ, to practise it, just in so far as the impulse of love within him is strong to use every opportunity of serving his fellows. If he resists not, yet fails to love, he will simply be crushed; but, with love, he will gain kingly place and power, though his throne, like that of his Master, be a cross.

We must guard ourselves, however, against one serious misconception. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has sometimes been called supra-moral—if, indeed, this term be not self-contradictory—in that it seems but little concerned with the mere struggle for righteousness, as compared with its ceaseless inculcation of the duty of loving. It is pointed out that Christ held constant converse with sinners, yet waged no direct warfare against lust, injustice, and other flagrant breaches of the moral law, while His scathing condemnation was reserved for those who were

outwardly irreproachable in conduct. The mistake here is due to a false construction put upon the meaning of love, as though it consisted chiefly in tender sympathy with all men. Sympathy opens the door through which love goes forth to do its work; but, standing alone, sympathy is always in danger of evaporating into mere sentimentality. True love seeks actively the highest good of the loved one, and this highest good is attainable only along the path of a whole-hearted consecration to righteousness. But, as already pointed out, righteousness must not be confounded with a formal morality; virtues which are not rooted in love, cease to bear the stamp of virtue to love's keen insight. Hence, to Christ, the root of all sin is pride; this alone shuts the heart absolutely to the access of love.

When once the motive power of the Gospel has taken full possession, the joyful mystery of the Cross begins to reveal itself. The Christian temper is misunderstood, when the prominence assigned to self-sacrifice seems to cast a gloom over the demands of the Gospel. In its purest form, Christianity combines the joyousness of the Greek mood, with the strenuous sense of duty that distinguished the Hebrew character. Only, the Christian road to joy lies through a different country from that of egoistic self-assertion. Sacrifice is its half-way house; but the goal is not reached until self-abnegation

becomes sweet with spiritual compensations, so that dolour is transformed into delight. It is only as marking progress toward life, not death, that sacrifice is lovely. Gladness is essential to the health and soundness of self-surrender.

This, the spirit of the Gospel, finds an illustration in that most winning of saints, Francis of Assisi. Good-cheer rings through all his words and acts; austerity is full of gracious sweetness; poverty has become the most beautiful of brides; the whole earth is overflowing with God's goodness, so that the humblest living creatures are like brothers and sisters, and in this boundless fellowship he tastes the exhilaration of perpetual childhood. The outward garb of Christian service differs widely from age to age, but the spirit abides. And in this abandonment of self-sacrificing love, wherein all joy is consummated, God sets His seal on the truth enunciated by Jesus Christ, that man must die in order that he may live.

Where love holds undisputed sway, it succeeds. In so far as we are conformed to the precepts of Jesus Christ, they prove the solvent of all practical difficulties; life, which before seemed intractable, yields to this mode of approach, and becomes replete with new interests and satisfactions. And when faith in Christ's teaching has carried us thus far, and

we have surrendered ourselves to that love which He inculcates, there begins to spring up in our hearts a faith in *Him* which lends self-evidencing power to all His words concerning spiritual verities.

This demonstration of the spirit is, from its very nature, an individual possession. It cannot be imparted by one man to another through the medium of words. Words, indeed, are impotent even to describe with adequacy any such transcendent experience. But to him who has once known this certitude, it is the sufficient foundation on which to erect a strong and confident religious life.

When faith has thus become the dominant influence, and Jesus Christ is known not merely according to the flesh, but after the spirit, it is but natural that a change should pass upon many facts connected with Christian Evidences, and that these should appear in a new light and endued with fresh significance. Doubtless this exposes the Christian to the charge of prejudice; and he may seem, at first sight, less fair-minded than the man who acknowledges the claim of no inner witness. But we have already found that this charge of bias is a sword with two edges. Initial unbelief is a prepossession as much as faith. And to him who accepts the validity of spiritual experience, sympathy bred by such experience will seem a

surer path to just conclusions, than the mood of cold indifference or active hostility.

A case in point, is the argument for the truth of the Gospel, drawn from the history of the Church and its triumphs. No series of facts, falling within the province of Christian Evidences, lends itself to more widely differing interpretations. On the one hand, it is possible to lay the accent on the credulity and superstition, the shortcomings and the cruelty, which have disgraced the Church. While granting that it has performed a useful service, in many respects, these conspicuous evils may loom so large that they seemingly stultify any claim to divine origin or heavenly mission. On the other hand, he who has himself tested the Gospel, and found it a savour of life unto life, will be more impressed with the evidence that the Church affords of an indestructible vitality, than with the imperfections incident to all institutions in which the frailty of humanity has share. Here is a Society in which personal devotion to Jesus Christ has been the centre of an unfailing enthusiasm; this has been the leaven that has preserved its essential soundness amidst all kinds of corruption. Its charter is the law of love: and grievously as this has been overlaid and forgotten at times, it has again and again reasserted itself, and proved the perennial source of moral and spiritual reformation. It is not so surprising

that the Church should have survived outward persecutions and the hostility of the world; but that it should have triumphed over the treachery of its friends and the disloyalty of its avowed servants, is truly cause for wonderment. He who has felt within himself the power of the Gospel can interpret the Church's life from the record of his own experience; to others, it must remain an enigma. To him its history wonderfully fulfils Christ's promise; the gates of hell have not prevailed against it; it is instinct with a divine life which assures an ever-enlarging victory. But without faith this hope is meaningless, and the mighty prophecies of a world-wide kingdom of righteousness seem but an empty dream.

It is true, that in reasoning with the unbeliever appeal cannot always be made to such spiritual postulates. But our Apologetic will have force, in proportion to the clearness with which we ourselves apprehend these deeper truths of the Spirit. They should ever form the background of our thought, for thus alone can we be saved from confusion, amidst the multiplicity of critical details, which constantly threaten to obscure the larger issues that are at stake.

If we are tempted to grow impatient, because formal Apologetics remain imperfect, and the argument never reaches the finality that we crave, let it be remembered that this is inevitable from the nature of the subject. Apology is relative to

ever-shifting needs. Certain fundamental speculative difficulties, inherent in the theme itself, abide from age to age. But man's intellectual horizon broadens, the increase of knowledge renders many an old argument out of date, and thus the logical form of Christian Apology, in many of its aspects, must of necessity continue to be partial, temporary, tentative. If we are possessed with a passion for systematic completeness, we must look elsewhere than to Apologetics for its satisfaction.

THE END

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